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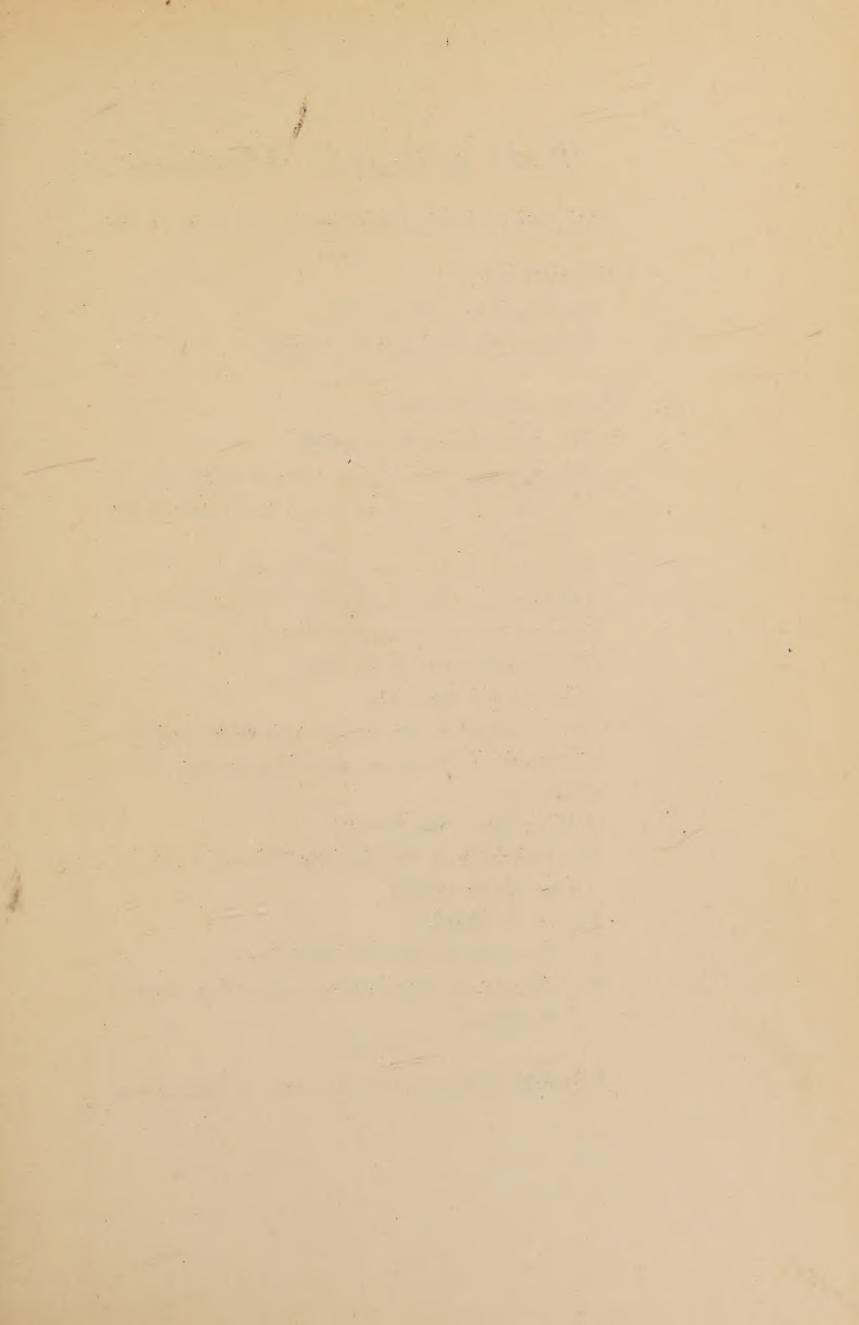
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PLAYWRIGHTS ON PLAYMAKING
AND OTHER
STUDIES OF THE STAGE



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PLAYWRIGHTS ON PLAYMAKING

AND OTHER STUDIES OF THE STAGE

BY
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TO THE MEMORY OF
E. L. BURLINGAME
My Friend for more than Forty Years

PREFATORY NOTE

As I have trod the long trail which leads slowly to the summit of three score years and ten, and as I am now swiftly descending into the dim valley beyond, this sheaf of essays is probably the last that I shall garner; and my septuagenarian vanity prompts me to set down here the theories of the theater that I have made my own after half a century of playgoing and of persistent effort to spy out the secrets of stage-craft. To me these theories appear so indisputable and, indeed, so obvious that I am ever surprized when I chance to see them challenged. They are not many, and they can be declared briefly.

I. The drama is an art, the laws of which (like those of all the other arts) are unchanging through the ages, altho their application has varied from century to century and from country to country.

II. The drama (again like the other arts) has its conventions, that is to say, its implied contracts between the artist and his public, without which it could not exist; and while some of these conventions are essential and therefore permanent, others are local and accidental, and therefore temporary.

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III. The dramatist, whether he is truly a poet or only an adroit playwright, has always composed his plays with the hope and expectation of seeing them performed, by actors, in a theater, and before an audience; and therefore what he has composed has always been conditioned, consciously or unconsciously, by the players, by the playhouses, and by the playgoers of his own race and of his own time.

These three theories may be more or less implicit in the 'Poetics' of Aristotle and in the 'Dramaturgy' of Lessing; and it would ill become me not to confess frankly my indebtedness to Francisque Sarcey, for first calling attention to the necessity of dramatic conventions. Among the moderns the influence of the audience seems to have been hinted at first by Castelvetro; James Spedding saw clearly the probable influence exerted upon Shakspeare by his fellow actors in the Globe Theater; and Gaston Boissier pointed out the probable influence exerted upon Plautus and Terence by the theaters of Rome; but I venture to believe that I had no predecessor in utilizing all three of these influences to elucidate the technic of Sophocles, of Shakspeare and of Molière,—to say nothing of the dramatists of our own day.

IV. I believe that I was also the first to show that the principle of Economy of Attention,

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which Herbert Spencer applied only to Rhetoric, was applicable to the other arts and more particularly to the drama.

V. Perhaps I may claim a share in the wide acceptance of Brunetière's 'Law of the Drama,'—that the drama is differentiated from the other forms of storytelling by the fact that an audience desires to behold a conflict, a stark assertion of the human will, a clash of character upon character.

These theories of the theater, which I feel to be mine, wherever I may have derived them, I have discussed now and again in the present volume, as I discussed them earlier in the 'Principles of Playmaking,' in the 'Development of the Drama,' in the 'Study of the Drama' and in my biographies of Shakspeare and Molière. In many years of lecturing to graduate classes I have found them useful in arousing the interest of students always eager to acquire insight into technic. What a dramatist meant to do—that is something about which we may endlessly dispute. What he actually did—that is something we can test and measure.

B. M.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

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I

PLAYWRIGHTS ON PLAYMAKING

I

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I

WE have no right to expect that a creator of art should be also a critic of art. He is a creator because he can create, because he can paint a picture, model a statue, tell a story in action on the stage or delineate character in narrative; and he needs only enough of the critical faculty to enable him to achieve the obligatory self-criticism, without which he may go astray. If he is a born story-teller, for instance, he may tell stories by native gift, almost without taking thought as to how he does it; and even if he does it very well, he may be an artist in spite of himself, so to speak. He may achieve his effects without analyzing his processes, perhaps without understanding them or even perceiving them. His methods are intuitive rather than rational; they are personal to him; and he cannot impart them to others.

He may in fact misconceive his own effort and see himself in a false light, sincerely believing that he is doing his work in one way when he is really doing it in another. Zola, for one, was

entirely at fault in the opinion he held about his own novels; he was so uncritical that he supposed himself to be a Realist, avid of facts, whereas he was unmistakably a Romanticist, planning epic edifices symmetrical and fantastic and forcing the facts he diligently sought for to fit as best they could into the structure of the dream-dwelling he was building. Zola was a tireless worker dowered with constructive imagination, but he was not more intelligent than the average man; and he was distinctly deficient in critical insight, as was swiftly disclosed when he ventured to discuss the principles of novel-writing and the practices of his fellow-craftsmen.

But there are artists, and not a few, who are keenly intelligent and who are able to philosophize about their calling; and whenever they are moved to talk about the technic of their several arts we shall do well to listen that we may learn. We can make our profit from what Horace and Wordsworth have to say about poetry and from what Pope and Poe have to say about versification. We can gain enlightenment from the remarks of Reynolds and Fromentin and La Farge on painting and from the remarks of Fielding and Scott, Howells and Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson about fiction. We must, of course, make our allowances in each case for the personal equation and for the predilection the

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artist-critic is likely to possess for the special school of art to which he himself belongs,—and also for the forgivable intolerance he sometimes reveals toward those who are students in other schools.

When the artist who is also a critic addresses the public, he has his eyes directed more often than not particularly to his fellow practitioners. Thus it is that he tends to deal more especially with technic and to talk about the processes of the craft and about the best method of achieving needed effects. Nor is this to be deplored, since we need all the information we can get about technic to enable us to appreciate the artist's accomplishment,—and who can supply this information so satisfactorily as the artist himself? There may be other points of view than the artist's, there is that of the public, for one, but the artist's must ever be the most significant; and what this is we can learn only from him. He at least has practised what he is preaching; and this fact gives a validity to his discourse.

Even in this twentieth century there are critics not a few who persist in dealing with the drama as literature only, deliberately ignoring its necessary connection with the theater. This is a wilful error, which vitiates only too many estimates of the masters of tragedy and comedy, Sophocles, Shakspeare, and Molière. Perhaps the best cor-

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rective is a consideration of the utterances of the dramatists who have discussed the principles of playmaking. Here we may find light, even if it is sometimes accompanied by more or less heat.

The list of the dramatists who have been tempted to talk about the drama as an art is long, far longer indeed than is suspected by those who have never sought to seek them out. It includes Lope de Vega, Ben Jonson and Dryden, Corneille and Molière, Goethe, Lessing and Grillparzer, Voltaire and Goldoni, Victor Hugo and the two Dumas, Ernest Legouv   and Jules Lema  tre, Bronson Howard and William Gillette, Arthur Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones. These are all the names of professional playwrights whose dramas, comic and tragic, withstood the ordeal by fire in the theater. Yet it may be well to point out that they divide themselves into two groups. We may put into the first group those who were critics by profession and whose reputation is due rather to their critical acumen than to their playmaking skill,—Ben Jonson and Dryden, Lessing and Jules Lema  tre. Then we put into a second group those who were critics only on occasion, their fame being based on their creative work,—Lope de Vega, Corneille and Moli  re, Grillparzer and Pinero, to name only a few. It is from these latter that we have a right to expect the most significant statements.

II

THE first thing we discover when we compare the opinions of the professional playwrights is that they agree in accepting the judgment of the audience as decisive and final. As their plays were composed for the delight of the spectators, they all feel that they are bound to accept the verdict rendered in the theater. They know better than any one else how vain is the hope of an appeal to any other tribunal. They were seeking success on the stage, not in the study; they desired to arouse and retain the interest of their own contemporaries in their own country. They gave no thought to posterity or to foreign nations. They recognized that they had no right to complain if they could not win over the jury by which they had chosen to be tried. In so far as the dramatists have expressed their opinion on this point they are unanimous.

In Professor William Lyon Phelps's lively little book on the 'Twentieth Century Theater,' he has told us about an unnamed author, who "profoundly influenced not only the stage but also modern thought" and who nevertheless maintained that the "true dramatist must not think of the box-office while he is writing his plays. He must express himself, which is the only reason

for writing at all. If what he writes happens to be financially successful, so much the better. But he must not think of popular success while at work." We cannot doubt the sincerity of these sentiments, since Professor Phelps has frankly informed us that the majority of this author's pieces "have been failures on the stage."

The practise of this unnamed author is in sharp opposition to that of Shakspeare and Molière, who were shrewd men of business, both of them. Shakspeare was susceptible to every veering shift in popular taste, giving the public sex-plays, 'Measure for Measure' and 'All's Well That Ends Well,' when other playwrights had stimulated the taste for that type of piece, and following the footsteps of Beaumont and Fletcher after these collaborators had won the favor of playgoers with their more or less spectacular dramatic-romances. Molière made haste to bolster the bill with a robust farce when the box-office receipts revealed to him that the 'Misanthrope' was not financially successful. Goethe displayed his customary insight when he told Eckermann that the greatest of English dramatists and the greatest of French dramatists, "wished, above all things, to make money by their theaters."

This wish of theirs did not interfere with the ability of Shakspeare and of Molière "to express himself." Of course, the dramatic poet desires

to express himself; but if he is a born playwright, he never thinks of trying to express himself except in conformity to the conditions of the dramatic art with its triple dependence on the playhouse itself, the players and the playgoers. Professor Phelps's unnamed author may have "profoundly influenced" both the stage and modern thought, but he was not a born playwright or he would have ever had "popular success" in mind while he was at work. If he did not value the winning of the suffrages of his constituents, why did he present himself at the polls? There are abundant facilities for self-expression in the novel and in the lyric. In the drama self-expression must take thought of the public, of its likes and its dislikes, of its many-headedness and of the variety of its tastes.

The opinions enunciated by this unnamed author are contrary to the practise of Shakspeare and Molière, and they are also contrary to the precepts of Lope de Vega and Corneille, who also profoundly influenced both the stage and what in their own day was "modern thought." Lope de Vega proclaimed his deference to the Italian theorists of the theater, regretting only that the playwrights who worked according to their precepts died "without fame and guerdon." Then he tells us (with his tongue in his cheek) that "when I have to write a play I lock in the pre-

cepts with six keys . . . and I write in accordance with that art which they devised who aspired to the applause of the crowd, for since the crowd pays for the plays, it is fitting to talk foolishly to it to satisfy its taste." Less than a quarter of a century later Corneille said almost exactly the same thing, perhaps sadly but certainly not ironically:

Since we write plays to be performed, our first object is to please the court and the people, and to attract many to the performances. We must, if we can, obey the precepts, so as not to displease the learned and to receive unanimous applause; but above all we must win the vote of the people.

And Molière less than thirty years later is equally plain-spoken:

I am willing to trust the decision of the multitude, and I hold it as difficult to combat a work which the public approves as to defend one which it condemns.

It may be noted that Corneille desired to gain, if possible, the good opinion of the learned, while he held it essential to gain that of the crowd. The younger Dumas once imagined his father replying to those who had asked him if he would not be satisfied if he had achieved the commendation of the best judges only: "No, the appro-

bation of these judges would not amply indemnify me for the coldness of the others, because the drama, which appeals to the many, cannot be satisfied with the approval of the few." In putting this opinion into the mouth of the elder Dumas, his son was but expressing the belief of every successful playwright who has been moved to discuss the art of the drama; and it may be well to recall the fact that in their own day all the great dramatists were only successful playwrights, their popularity being beyond question even if their greatness was still in doubt.

III

THERE are other beliefs of the successful playwrights, perhaps not so unanimously expressed, yet widely held. One of them is that the playwright, like the poet, is born and not made. The younger Dumas declared that a man "may become a painter, a sculptor, even a musician, by study—but not a playwright. . . . It is a freak of nature, which has constructed the vision as to enable him to see things in a certain way." He added that this very rare faculty is revealed in the first attempt at playwriting, however unambitious this juvenile effort may be. Goethe had said almost the same thing, asserting that "writing for the stage is something peculiar. . . . It

is a craft which one must understand and it requires a talent which one must possess." In other words, the playwright, like the poet again, must be born, and he must be made also, after he is born, since he needs to master the technic of the trade.

On another occasion Goethe spoke of the prolixity of Schiller's earlier pieces, a fault which Schiller was never quite able to overcome. Goethe commented that it "is more difficult than is imagined to control a subject properly, to keep it from overpowering one, and to concentrate one's attention on that alone which is absolutely essential." The younger Dumas, who always knew what he was driving at, declared that the first qualification of the accomplished dramatist was logic, which "must be implacable from beginning to end. . . . The playwright must unfailingly place before the spectator that part of the being or thing for or against which he wishes to draw a conclusion."

Sir Arthur Pinero agrees with Dumas in holding that

dramatic, like poetic, talent is born, not made; if it is to achieve success it must be developed into theatrical talent by hard study and generally by long practice. For theatrical talent consists in the power of making your characters not only tell a story by means of dialog but tell it in such skilfully devised form and

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order as shall, within the limits of an ordinary theatrical representation, give rise to the greatest amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect the production of which is the one great function of the theater.

This theatrical talent has to be exercised within the limits of the theater as this exists at the time when the dramatist lives. The principles of playmaking are eternal, no doubt, but the practices of playmaking are modified by the constantly changing conditions of the stage.

Pinero likens the art of the drama to the art of war, the permanent principles of playmaking to strategy, and its variable principles to tactics. Strategy is to-day what it was yesterday; and it was succinctly defined during our Civil War by General Forrest, when he said it consisted in "getting there first with the most men"—that is to say, in gaining an advantageous position for yourself and putting the enemy in a disadvantageous position. It is therefore unchanging in its essential elements, Foch profiting by the example of Napoleon and Cæsar, Hannibal and Alexander. But tactics are in incessant modification, as the soldier has new implements put in his hands by the inventions of the ages, gunpowder unhorsing the man in armor and tanks taking the place of elephants. While the strategy of the drama is constant, its tactics "are always changing," so Pinero has put it; and

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every dramatist whose ambition it is to produce live plays is absolutely bound to study carefully, and I may add respectfully—at any rate not contemptuously—the conditions that hold good for his own age and generation.

The strategy of Shakspeare is that of Sophocles, of Molière and of Ibsen, even if the later men did not recognize their own obedience to the laws which had governed the earlier. The tactics of Sophocles were diametrically opposed to those of Shakspeare, because the Greek dramatist built his massive plays to conform to the conditions of the immense open air theater of Athens with its extraordinarily intelligent spectators, whereas the English dramatist had to adjust his pieces, comic and tragic, to the bare platform of the half-timbered London playhouse, with its gallants seated on the stage and its rude and turbulent groundlings standing in the unroofed yard. So the tactics of Molière and Ibsen are strangely unlike, the French author fitting his comedies to a long, narrow theater, dimly lighted by candles, with the courtiers accommodated on benches just behind the curtain and with the well-to-do burghers of Paris making up the bulk of the audience, while the stern Scandinavian found his profit in the modern picture-frame stage, with its realistic sets and with its spectators comfortably seated in front of the curtain. Each of the four fol-

lowed the methods of his own time and place; and each in turn made the best of the theatrical conditions which confronted him. But however much they may differ in practice, in tactics they worked in accord with the same principles, and employed the same strategy.

Bronson Howard admitted that Aeschylus "taught the future world the art of writing a play" but he "did not create the laws of dramatic construction. Those laws exist in the passions and sympathies of the human race." A little later in the same address, Bronson Howard declared that the laws of dramatic construction "bear about the same relation to human character and human sympathies as the laws of nature bear to the material universe." In other words, the drama is what it is, what it always has been, what it always will be, because human nature is what it is and was and will be. And this brings us back to the inexorable fact that the eternally dominating element in the theater is the audience. "The dramatist," so Bronson Howard reminded us, "must remember that his work cannot, like that of the novelist or the poet, pick out the hearts, here and there, that happen to be in sympathy with its subject. He appeals to a thousand hearts at the same moment; he has no choice in the matter; he must do this." That is to say, the drama is inimitably "a function of

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the crowd," as Mr. Walkley has aptly called it.

Finally, Bronson Howard pointed out that there is no great difficulty in obeying the laws of dramatic construction, even if it may be impossible to declare them with precision. "Be honest and sincere" in using

your common sense in the study of your own and other people's emotions. . . . The public will be your jury. That public often condescends to be trifled with by mere tricksters, but believe me, it is only a condescension, and very contemptuous. In the long run, the public will judge you, and respect you, according to your artistic sincerity.

What has here been quoted from the critical writings of the dramatists may seem to some rather elementary; but it is perhaps all the more valuable. As Diderot once said, "a man must have a deep knowledge of any art or science before he is in possession of its elements."

(1920)

II

UNDRAMATIC CRITICISM

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sterility of Alexandria that the laws of poetry were codified with Draconian severity. It was not under Louis XIV but under Napoleon, when French literature was dying of inanition, that Nepemucène Lemer cier declared the twenty-five rules which the writer of tragedy must obey and the twenty-two to which the writer of comedy must conform.

There was no living Latin drama when Horace penned his epistle on poetry, and the theaters of Rome were given over to unliterary spectacle. It is unlikely that Horace had ever had occasion to see a worthy play worthily acted. No doubt he had read the works of the great Greeks, but that could not disclose to him the full emotional force of their dramas revealed only by actual performance. To judge a play by reading it is like judging a picture by a photograph. The greater the drama the more completely does it put forth its power when it is made to live by the actor in the theater and before the audience. As a result of Horace's lack of experience as a spectator, what he has to say about the principles of playmaking has little validity. He is not exercising his own keen critical faculty; he is merely echoing the opinions of Alexandrian critics. His counsel to aspiring dramatists was not practical; it was academic in the worst sense of the word. In fact, Horace was only going

through the motions of giving advice, since there were no aspiring dramatists in Rome, as there were then no stages on which a play could be acted and no company of actors to perform it.

A comparison of the 'Poetics' of Aristotle with the 'Art of Poetry' of Horace is as amusing as it is profitable. Aristotle is the earliest and the shrewdest of dramatic critics. Horace had no intimacy with the theater. Horace is sketching from a lay-figure in a studio, whereas Aristotle is drawing from the living model in the open air. When Aristotle discusses the effect of an episode upon an audience, we can be sure that he himself was once one of that audience, and that his memory had retained the intonations and the gestures of the actors as well as the unformulated response of the spectators to the emotional appeal of the plot. Aristotle is as insistent in taking the audience in account as Sarcey was; and his dramatic criticism is as technical as Sarcey's. Horace had never thrilled to a situation as it slowly unfolded itself in the theater; and therefore what he has to say about the principles of playmaking is more or less beside the mark. It is hit or miss; it may be right or it may be wrong; it is supported by no understanding of dramaturgy; it is undramatic criticism.

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The theories which Horace took over second-

hand from the Alexandrian criticasters, the supersubtle Italians of the Renaissance took third-hand from him. They suffered, as Horace had suffered, from the lack of a living dramatic literature in their own tongue. In the pride of their newfound learning they looked with contempt upon the unliterary types of drama then popular, the Sacred Representations and the Comedy-of-Masks. They never suspected that in these artless exhibitions there were the germs out of which a noble dramatic literature might be evolved. They could not foresee that the Elizabethans would develop their tragedy from the English Mystery-Plays, which were no cruder than the Italian Sacred Representations, and that in the 'Étourdi' Molière would lift into literature the loose and lively Comedy-of-Masks. And because they refused to do what Shakspeare and Molière were to do, they left Italy barren of drama for centuries. The most of the dramatic poems which are catalogued in the histories of Italian literature were unacted and unactable,—altho now and again one or another did achieve performance by amateurs before an audience of dilettants.

So it is that the host of theorists of the theater in Renaissance Italy are undramatic critics, not because they lacked acuteness, but because they knew nothing of the actual theater, the sole re-

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gion where drama can live, move and have its being. Only infrequently does one of them,—Castelvetro, for example,—venture to give a thought to the audience for whose delight a drama ought to be prepared. As they had no acquaintance with any stage, except the sporadic platform of the strolling acrobat-comedians whom they despised, they had no concrete knowledge as a foundation for their abstract speculation. They were working in a vacuum. And it is small wonder that they complicated their concepts until they had elaborated the Classicist doctrines of the Three Unities and of the total separation of Comedy from Tragedy. The Classicist code was so hampering to the free expansion of the drama that Corneille cried out against its rigor, that Lope de Vega paid it lip-service but disregarded it unhesitatingly, and that Shakspeare never gave it a thought—excepting only when he was writing his last play, the ‘Tempest.’

II

HORACE’S mistake was in his adventuring himself beyond the boundaries of his knowledge; and the blunder of the Renaissance critics was caused by their scornful disregard of the contemporary types of drama in their own time, artless as these might be. But nowadays the

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theater is flourishing and every man has frequent opportunity to see worthy plays worthily performed and to acquaint himself with the immediate effect of a worthy performance upon the spectators. No apology is acceptable for the undramatic criticism which we discover in not a few of the learned treatises which profess to expound and explain the masterpieces of the mighty dramatists who lived in Periclean Athens and in Elizabethan England. Some of the scholars, who discuss Sophocles and Shakspeare, deal with these expert playwrights as if their pieces had been composed not to be seen in swift action in the theater but to be read at leisure in the library. In their eyes 'Ædipus the King' and 'Othello' are only dramatic poems, and not poetic dramas. They study the printed page under the microscope; and they make no effort to recapture the sound of the spoken word or to visualize the illustrative action.

The undramatic critic of this type has no apprehension of the principles of playmaking, as these are set forth by Aristotle and by Lessing, by Sarcey and by Brunetière. He has made no effort to keep abreast of the "state of the art" of dramatic criticism. He seems never to have considered the triple influence exerted on the form and on the content of a play by the theater for which it was composed, by the actors for

whom its characters were intended or by the audience for whose pleasure it was written. It is only occasionally that we have proffered to us a book like the late Professor Goodell's illuminating analysis of 'Athenian Tragedy,' in which we are agreeably surprized to find a Greek scholar elucidating the masterpieces of the Greek drama by the aid of Brunetière's 'Law of the Drama' and Archer's 'Playmaking.' Professor Goodell firmly grasped the fact that the art of the drama is unchanging, no matter how various its manifestations may be in different centuries and in different countries. And he was therefore able to cast light upon the plays of the past by his observation of the plays of the present.

Less satisfactory is an almost contemporary volume on 'Greek Tragedy,' which covers the same ground. Altho Professor Norwood has not found his profit in Brunetière or Archer, he makes a valiant effort to visualize actual performance in the Theater of Dionysus more than twenty centuries ago. He deals with Greek plays as poetic dramas and not merely as dramatic poems. But he has fallen victim to the wiles of the late Professor Verrall, one of the most ingenious of undramatic critics; and in his discussion of 'Agamemnon' of Æschylus he gives Verrall credit for having solved a series of difficulties. Professor Norwood even goes so far as

to declare that "Verrall's theory should probably be accepted."

I doubt if a single one of the alleged difficulties even occurred to any of the spectators present at the first performance of the play. The action of 'Agamemnon' is swift, irresistible, inevitable; and the audience was allowed no time for cavil. As the story unrolled itself in the theater it was convincing; and if any doubt arose in the mind of any spectator as to anything that had occurred, it could arise only after he had left the theater; and then it was too late. As a play, performed by actors, in a theater, before an audience, 'Agamemnon' triumphs. Only when it is considered in the study do we perceive any "difficulties." In fact, when so considered one difficulty is likely to strike many readers; and it repays consideration.

The play begins with a long monolog from a watchman of the roof of Agamemnon's palace. The king is at the siege of Troy; and when the beleaguered city is taken a series of beacons on the intervening hills will be lighted, one after another, to convey the glad news. Suddenly the watchman sees the distant flame, the wireless message that Troy has fallen and that the monarch is free to return home. In real life it would be two or three weeks before Agamemnon would arrive; yet in the play, before it is half over, the

king comes in; he enters his palace, where he is done to death by his guilty wife and her paramour, Ægisthus. The exigencies of the two hours' traffic of the stage often compel a playwright to telescope time; but no other dramatist has ever dared so violent a compression as this.

And this is how Verrall solves the difficulty "with lucidity, skill and brilliance," so Professor Norwood tells us. The story of the series of beacons is a lie concocted by the wife and her lover. There is only one beacon, which Ægisthus lights when he discovers the landing of Agamemnon; it is to warn his accomplice that she may make ready to murder her husband. And as Agamemnon is actually on shore when this single beacon flames up, he is able to arrive in the middle of the play. If we accept this solution of the difficulty we are compelled to believe that Æschylus wrote a play, instantly accepted as a masterpiece, which had to wait for more than two thousand years for a British scholar to explain away an impossibility. This explanation is undoubtedly lucid and skilful and brilliant; but none the less is it a specimen of undramatic criticism. It could never have been put forward by anyone who had an elementary knowledge of the principles of playmaking.

A dramatist never tells lies to his audience; and the audience always accepts the statements

of his characters as true—unless he himself takes care to suggest that a given statement is false. The play has to be taken at its face value. The characters talk on purpose to convey all needful information to the spectators. Æschylus may make the queen lie to the king, but when she does this the audience is aware of the truth or surmises it. The dramatist never hesitates to let his characters deceive one another; but if he knows his business he does not deceive the spectators. In real life Agamemnon could not arrive for a fortnight after Troy had fallen; but the Athenian audience could not wait in their seats two weeks, so Æschylus frankly brings on Agamemnon; and the spectators were glad to behold him, asking no inconvenient questions, because they were eager to see what would happen to him. It might be a contradiction of the fact, but it was not a departure from the truth, since the king would assuredly come home sooner or later. Everyone familiar with Sarcey's discussion of the conventions of the drama is aware that the spectators in the theater are never sticklers for fact; they are willing to accept a contradiction of fact, if that contradiction is for their own profit, as it was in this case. And they accept it unthinkingly; and it is only when they hold the play in their hands to pick it to pieces that they discover any "difficulty."

III

To say this is to say that Verrall, however lucid and skilful and brilliant, was a discoverer of mares' nests. And a host of undramatic critics have skilfully exercised their lucid brilliance in discovering mares' nests in Shakspeare's plays. Most of them are stolid Teutons, with Gervinus and Ulrici in the forefront of the procession. They analyzed the tragedies of Shakspeare with the sincere conviction that he was a philosopher with a system as elaborate as those of Kant and Hegel; and they did not seem to suspect that even if a dramatist is a philosopher he is—and must be—first of all a playwright, whose invention and construction are conditioned by the theater for which he is working. Even in the greatest plays philosophy is a by-product; and the main object of the great dramatist is always to arouse and retain and reward the interest of his immediate audience.

He must make his story plain to the comprehension of the average playgoer; and he must therefore provide his characters with motives which are immediately apparent and instantly plausible. Shakspeare is ever anxious that his spectators shall not be misled, and he goes so far as to have his villains, Richard III and Iago, frankly inform the audience that they are vil-

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lains, a confession which in real life neither of these astute scoundrels would ever have made to anybody. The playwright knows that if he loses his case before the jury, he can never move for a retrial; the verdict is without appeal. It may be doubted whether any dramatist has ever cared greatly for the opinion of posterity. Assuredly no popular playwright—and in their own day every great dramatist was a popular playwright—would have found any compensation for the failure of his play in the hope and expectation that two hundred or two thousand years later its difficulties might be explained by a Verrall, however lucid and skilful and brilliant this belated expounder might be.

There are two Shaksperian mares' nests which may be taken as typical, altho the eggs in them are not more obviously addled than in a host of others. One was discovered in 'Macbeth,' in the scene of Banquo's murder. Macbeth incites two men to make way with Banquo; but when the deed is done, three murderers take part in it. Two of them are the pair we have seen receiving instructions from Macbeth. Who is the third? An undramatic critic once suggested that this third murderer is no less a person than Macbeth himself, joining his hired assassins to make sure that they do the job in workmanlike fashion. The suggester supported his suggestion by an

argument in eight points, no one of which carries any weight, because we may be sure that if Shakspeare had meant Macbeth to appear in person, he would have taken care to let the audience know it. He would not have left it hidden to be uncovered two and a half centuries after his death by the skilful lucidity of a brilliant undramatic critic.

It is reasonably certain that Burbage, who acted Richard III and Hamlet, also acted Macbeth; and Shakspeare would never have sent this renowned performer on the stage to take part in a scene without justifying his share in it and without informing the spectators that their favorite was before them. Shakspeare was an actor himself; he knew what actors wanted and what they liked; he took good care of their interests; and we may rest assured that he never asked Burbage to disguise his identity. If he had meant the third murderer to be Macbeth, we should have had the stage direction, "Enter two murderers with Macbeth disguised." As it is, the stage direction reads "Enter three murderers."

The other mare's nest has been found in 'King Lear.' It has often been pointed out that Cordelia is absent from a large portion of the action of the tragedy, altho her presence might have aided its effectiveness. It has been noted also

that Cordelia and the Fool are never seen on the stage together. And this has prompted the suggestion that the Fool is Cordelia in disguise. Here again we see the undramatic critic at his worst. If Shakspeare had meant this, he would have made it plain to the spectators the first time Cordelia appeared as the Fool,—otherwise her assumption of this part would have been purposeless, confusing, futile. Whatever poignancy there might be in the companioning of the mad king by his cast-off daughter all unknown to him, would be unfelt if her assumption of the Fool's livery was not at once recognized. The suggestion is not only unacceptable, it is unthinkable by anyone who has even an elementary perception of the playmaking art. It could have emanated only from an undramatic critic who was familiar with 'King Lear' in the study and not on the stage, who regarded the sublimest of Shakspeare's tragedies as a dramatic poem and not as a poetic drama planned for the playhouse.

Yet this inept suggestion can be utilized to explain the fact that Cordelia and the Fool never meet before the eyes of the spectators. The cast of characters in 'King Lear' is very long; and quite possibly it called for more actors than there were in the limited company at the Globe. We know that in the Tudor theater a performer was often called upon to sustain two parts. It is

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possible that the shaven lad who impersonated Cordelia was the only available actor for the Fool, and that therefore Cordelia—at whatever loss to the effectiveness of the play—could not appear in the scenes in which the Fool had to appear. Cordelia did not don the disguise of the Fool; but the same performer may have doubled the two parts. That much of supposition can be ventured for whatever it may be worth.

IV

It is in England and in Germany that the undramatic critics have been permitted to disport themselves most freely and most frequently. In France they have never been encouraged to pernicious activity. That the French have not suffered from this pest may be due to the honorable existence of the Théâtre Français, where the masterpieces of French tragedy and of French comedy have been kept alive on the stage for which they had been written; or it may be due to the fact that in the literature of France the drama has been continuously more important than it has been in the literature of any other country.

In England and in Germany the drama has had its seasons of abundance and its seasons of famine, whereas in France, altho there might be poor harvests for a succession of years, harvests

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of some sort there always have been. No period in French literature is as devoid of valid drama as that in English literature during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century. From 1800 to 1870 the plays of our language which were actable were unreadable and the plays which were readable were unactable. It is in the periods of penury, when there is a divorce between literature and the drama, that the undramatic critic is inspired to chase rainbows. As there is then no vital drama in the theater, and as the pieces then exhibited on the stage have little validity, the undramatic critic is led to the conclusion that since the theater can get along without literature, so the drama can get along without the theater. And that way madness lies.

There is this excuse for the supersubtle critics of the Italian Renaissance that they lived not long removed from the middle ages, in which all memory of the acted drama had been lost and in which the belief was general that the comedies of Plautus and Terence had been composed, not for performance by actors in a theater and before an audience, but for a single reciter who should deal with them as a modern elocutionist might stand and deliver 'Pippa Passes' or the 'Cenci.' But there is no excuse for the English-speaking expounders of Sophocles and Shakspeare, because

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they cannot help knowing that the plays of the Athenian were written to be performed in the Theater of Dionysus and that the plays of the Elizabethan were written to be performed in the Globe theater.

A friend of mine, not yet forty, told me that as an undergraduate he had read half-a-dozen Greek plays with a professor, who was an enthusiastic admirer of Greek literature, who had spent a winter in Athens, and who had acquired modern Greek. This professor spared no pains to make his students appreciate the poetic beauty of Athenian tragedy; but never once did he call their attention to the circumstances of original performance or arouse their interest by pointing out the theatrical effectiveness of the successive situations. To this ardent lover of Greece and of Greek literature, the 'Agamemnon,' the 'Ædipus,' and the 'Medea' were only poems in dialog; they were not plays composed to be acted, adjusted to the conditions of the Athenian theater, and conforming to the conventions tacitly accepted by the Attic audience.

But worse remains behind. The writer of the chapters on Shakspeare in the composite 'Cambridge History of English Literature,' deals skillfully and cautiously with the dates of composition and performance of each of the plays; but he criticizes them with no examination of their

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theatrical effectiveness. It is scarcely too much to say that he considers them as dramatic poems intended to be read rather than as poetic dramas intended to be acted. Nothing in either of his chapters is evidence that he ever saw a comedy or a tragedy of Shakspeare's on the stage. He reveals no knowledge of the principles of play-making; and it may be doubted whether he suspects the existence of these principles. And in one passage of his commentary he has given us the absolute masterpiece of undramatic criticism:

It is, of course, quite true that all of Shakspeare's plays were written to be acted; but it may be questioned whether this is much more than an accident arising from the fact that the drama was the dominant form of literature. It was a happy accident, because of the unique opportunity this form gives of employing both the vehicles of poetry and prose.

(1921)

III

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I

EVERY dramatist is of necessity subdued to what he works for—the playgoers of his own generation in his own country. Their approval it is that he has to win first of all; and if they render a verdict against him he has no appeal to posterity. It is a matter of record that a play which failed to please the public in its author's lifetime never succeeded later in establishing itself on the stage. Partizans may prate about the dramatic power of the 'Blot in the 'Scutcheon,' but when it is—as it has been half-a-dozen times—galvanized into a semblance of life for a night or a fortnight, it falls prone in the playhouse as dead as it was when Macready first officiated at its funeral. Even the 'Misanthrope,' mightiest of Molière's comedies and worthy of all the acclaim it has received, was not an outstanding triumph when its author impersonated Alceste, and it has rarely rewarded the efforts of the succession of accomplished actors who have tried to follow the footsteps of the master; it is praised, it is admired; but it does not attract

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the many to the theater, because it does not give them abundantly the special pleasure that only the theater can bestow. 'Tartuffe' and the 'Femmes Savantes' do this and also half-a-score of Molière's lighter and less ambitious pieces, supported by stories more theatrically effective than that of the 'Misanthrope.'

The playwright who is merely a clever craftsman of the stage has no higher aim than to win the suffrages of his contemporaries. He knows what they want—for he is one of them—and he gives them what they want, no more and no less. He does not put himself into his plays; and perhaps his plays would be little better if he did. He is strenuously and insistently "up to date," as the phrase is; and as a result he is soon "out of date." He writes to be in the fashion; and the more completely he portrays the fleeting modes of the moment, the more swiftly must he fall out of fashion. The taste of the day is never the taste of after days; and the journalist-dramatist buys his evanescent popularity at a price. Who now is so poor as to pay reverence to Kotzebue and to Scribe, who once had all the managers at their feet? No maker of plays, not Lope de Vega or Dumas—Alexander the Great—was more fertile than Scribe in the invention of effective situations, none was ever more dextrous in the knotting and

unknotting of plots, grave and gay. But his fertility and his dexterity have availed him little. He wrote for his own time, not for all time. What sprang up in the morning of his career and bloomed brightly in the sunshine, was by night-fall drooping and withered and desiccated.

The comic dramatists of the Restoration had perforce to gratify the lewd likings of vicious spectators who wanted to see themselves on the stage even more vicious than they were. Congreve and Wycherly put into their comedies what their contemporaries relished, a game flavor that stank in the nostrils of all decent folk. The Puritan shrank with horror from the picture in which the Impuritan recognized his own image. So it was that a scant hundred years after they had insulted the moral sense (which, like Truth, tho "crushed to earth will rise again; the eternal years of God are hers,") they were swept from the stage. What had delighted under Charles II disgusted under George IV.

Even the frequent attempt to deodorize them failed, for, as Sheridan said—and he knew by experience since he had made his 'Trip to Scarborough' out of the 'Relapse'—the Restoration comedies were "like horses; you rob them of their vice and you rob them of their vigor." Charles Lamb, who had a whimsical predilection for them, admitted that they were "quite extinct

on our stage." Congreve's pistol no longer discharged its steel bullets; and Wycherly no longer knocked his victims down with the butt of his gun. Yet they died hard; I am old enough to have seen Daly's company in the 'Trip to Scarborough' and the 'Recruiting Officer,' in the 'Inconstant,' in 'She Would and She Would Not' and the 'Country Girl' (Garrick's skilful cleansing of Wycherly's unspeakable 'Country Wife')—all of which reappeared because they had appealing plots, amusing situations and lively characters and because they did not portray the immorals of the days of Nell Gwyn.

Yet when an adroit playwright who seeks to please the public of his own time by the representation of its manners, happens to be also a creative artist, enamored of life, he is sometimes able so to vitalize his satire of a passing vogue that it has abiding vigor. This is what Molière did when he made fun of the 'Précieuses Ridicules.' Even when he was writing this cleverest of skits, the coterie which had clustered around Madame de Rambouillet was disintegrating and would have disappeared without his bold blows. But affectation is undying; it assumes new shapes; it is always a tempting target; and Molière, by the magic of his genius, transcended his immediate purpose. He composed a satire of one special manifestation of pretence which sur-

vives after two centuries and a half as an adequate satire of all later manifestations. The *Précieuses* in Paris have long since been gathered to their mothers; so have the *Esthetes* across the channel in London; and soon they will be followed to the grave by the Little Groups of Serious Thinkers who are to-day settling the problems of the cosmos by the aid of empty phrases. No one sees the '*Précieuses Ridicules*' to-day without recognizing that it is almost as fresh as it was when Madame de Rambouillet enjoyed it.

The man of genius is able to please his own generation by his depiction of its foibles and yet to put into his work the permanent qualities which make it pleasing to the generations that come after him. The trick may not be easy, but it can be turned. How it shall be done,—well, that is one of the secrets of genius. In the case of the '*Précieuses Ridicules*' we can see that Molière framed a plot for his lively little piece that is perennially pleasing, a plot which only a little modified was to support two popular successes nearly two centuries later,—the '*Ruy Blas*' of Victor Hugo and the '*Lady of Lyons*' of Bulwer-Lytton. He tinged his dialog with just enough timeliness to hit the taste of the town in 1658; and he did not so surcharge it as to fatigue the playgoers of Paris two centuries and a half later.

II

THE likings of the groundlings who stood in the yard of the Globe theater when Shakspeare began to write plays were coarser and grosser than those of the burghers whom Molière had to attract to the Petit-Bourbon; and unfortunately Shakspeare in his earlier efforts was not as cautious as Molière. In the Falstaff plays, for example, the fat knight is as alive to-day as when Elizabeth is fabled to have expressed the wish to have him shown in love. But the talk of his companions, Nym and Pistol, is too thickly bespangled with the tricks of speech of Elizabethan London to interest American and British theatergoers three hundred years later. There is but a faded appeal in topical allusions which need to be explained before they are appreciated and even before they are understood; and in the playhouse itself footnotes are impossible.

In his earliest pieces, written during his arduous apprenticeship to the craft of playmaking, when he was not yet sure of his footing in the theater, Shakspeare had to provide parts for a pair of popular fun-makers,—Will Kempe and another as yet unidentified. They were lusty and robust comedians accustomed to set the house in a roar as soon as they showed their cheerful faces. They created the two Dromios,

the two Gobbos, Launce and Speed, Costard and Dull; and it is idle to deny that not a little of the talk that Shakspeare put in their mouths is no longer laughter-provoking; it is not only too topical, too deliberately Tudor, it is also too mechanical in its effort at humor to move us to mirth to-day. Their merry jests,—Heaven save the mark!—are not lifted above the level of the patter of the “sidewalk comedians” of our variety-shows. They are frankly “clowns”; and Shakspeare has set down for them what the groundlings expected them to utter, only little better than the rough repartee and vigorous innuendo and obvious pun which they would have provided for themselves if they had been free to do as they were wont to do. What he gives them to say is rarely the utterance of the characters they were supposed to be interpreting; and this is because the two Dromios are parts only, are not true characters, and are scarcely to be accepted even as types.

A difference of taste in jests, so George Eliot declared, is “a great strain on the affections”; and it would be insulting to the creator of Bottom and Falstaff to pretend that we have any affectionate regard for Costard and Dull, for Launce and Speed. It is only when Shakspeare was coming to the end of his apprenticeship that he found out how to utilize the talents of

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Kempe and of Kempe's unknown comrade in comedy, in parts which without ceasing to be adjusted to their personalities were also accusable characters, Dogberry and Touchstone. But when we come to Touchstone we are forced to perceive that Shakspeare was the child of his own age even when he refrained from echoing its catchwords. He was cleaner than the majority of his rivals, but he was near enough to Rabelais to be frank of speech. On occasion he can be of the earth, earthy. He bestows upon Touchstone a humor which is at times Rabelaisian in its breadth, in its outspoken plainness of speech, assured of the guffaws of the riffraff and rabble of a Tudor seaport, but a little too coarse for the descendants of the Puritans on either side of the Atlantic to-day. Nearly fifty years ago when Harry Beckett was rehearsing in 'As You Like It' for one of the infrequent Shaksperian revivals that Lester Wallack ventured to make, he told me sorrowfully that his part had been sadly shorn, some of Touchstone's best lines having been sacrificed in deference to the increasing squeamishness of American audiences.

These accessory comic parts are not alone in their readjustment to the modifying moods of a later age. The point of view changes with every generation, and with every change a character is likely to be seen from a different angle. No

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dramatist, whatever his genius, can foresee the future and forecast the fate of his creatures. The centuries follow one another in orderly procession, and they are increasingly unlike. Moreover, the dramatist of genius, by the very fact that he is a genius, is forever building better than he knew. He may put a character into a play for a special purpose; and after a century or two that character will loom larger than its creator dreamt and will stand forward, refusing to keep the subordinate place for which it was deliberately designed. We listen to the lines he utters and we read into them meanings which the author could not have intended, but which, none the less, are there to be read by us.

We may even accept as tragic a figure whom the playwright expected to be received as comic and who was so received by the audience for which the playwright wrote. Sometimes this is a betrayal of his purpose, as it is when aspiring French actors have seen fit to represent the Figaro of Beaumarchais (in the 'Marriage of Figaro,' not in the 'Barber of Seville') as a violent and virulent precursor of the French Revolution; or as it is when the same French actors insist on making the Georges Dandin of Molière a subject for pity, tear-compelling rather than laughter-provoking.

It is not a betrayal, however, rather is it a

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transfiguration when the Shylock of Shakspeare is made to arouse our sympathy. I make no doubt that Shakspeare projected Shylock as a comic villain, at whom he intended the spectators to laugh, even if they also shuddered because of his bloodthirstiness. Yet by sheer stress of genius this sinister creature, grotesque as he may be, is drawn with such compelling veracity that we cannot but feel for him. We are shocked by the insulting jeers of Gratiano at the moment of his discomfiture. We are glad that his plot against Antonio has failed; none the less do we feel that he has been miserably tricked; we are almost ready to resent the way in which the cards have been stacked against him.

To anyone who has familiarized himself with the attitude of Elizabethan playgoers toward usurers and toward the Jews, it is evident that Shakspeare intended the 'Merchant of Venice' to be a Portia play; its action begins with talk about Belmont and it ends at Belmont itself; and Shylock is absent from the final act. In spite of this intent of the author, the 'Merchant of Venice' has become in our eyes a Shylock play. In fact, Macready four-score years ago used to appear in a three-act version which ended with the trial scene,—a most inartistic perversion of the comedy. After all, the 'Merchant of Venice' *is* a comedy, even if its love-story is sustained and

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stiffened by a terrible underplot. Shakspeare created the abhorrent Shylock that the lovely Portia could cleverly circumvent him and score off him and put him to shame. His hardness of heart was to make more refulgent her brightness of soul. Shylock was set up to be scorned and hated and derided; he is a vindictive money-lender, insisting on a horrible penalty; no one in the play has a good word for him or a kindly thought; his servant detests him and his daughter has no natural affection for him.

When all is said, we cannot but feel that Shakspeare in his treatment of Shylock displays a callousness not uncommon in Elizabethan England. And yet—and yet Shakspeare is true to his genius; he endows Shylock with life. The Jew stands before us and speaks for himself; and we feel that we understand him better than the genius who made him. Our sympathy goes out to him; and altho we do not wish the play to end otherwise than it does, we are almost ready to regard him as the victim of a miscarriage of justice, guilty though he is. Ellen Terry has quoted from a letter of Henry Irving's a significant confession: "Shylock is a ferocity, I know—but I cannot play him that way!" Why couldn't he? It was because the nineteenth century was not the sixteenth, because Victorian audiences were not Elizabethan, because the peoples who have Eng-

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lish for their mother-tongue are less callous and more civilized than their forebears of three hundred years ago.

III

WHILE it is more than three hundred years since Shakspeare wrote the 'Merchant of Venice,' it is less than a hundred and fifty since Sheridan wrote the 'School for Scandal.' The gap that yawns between us and Sheridan is not so wide or so deep as the gulf that divides us from Shakspeare; but it is obvious enough. Even a hundred years ago Charles Lamb declared that the audiences of his time were becoming more and more unlike those of Sheridan's day, and that this increasing unlikeness was forcing the actors to modify their methods, a little against their wills. Sheridan's two brilliant comedies continue to delight us by their solidity of structure, their vigor of characterization and their insistent sparkle of dialog. In the 'Rivals' Sheridan is following in the footsteps of his fellow Irishman, Farquhar, and in the 'School for Scandal' he is matching himself against Congreve. In both he was carrying on the tradition of Restoration comedy, with its coldheartedness, its hard glitter, its delineation of modes rather than morals. It is perhaps too much to assert that most of his characters are unfeeling; but it is not too much to say

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that they are regardless of the feelings of others—perhaps because their own emotions are only skin-deep.

It is true that in the 'Rivals' Sheridan threw a sop to the admirers of Sentimental Comedy and introduced a couple of high-strung and weepful lovers, Falkland and Julia, who are forever sentimentalizing. But this precious pair have been found so uninteresting that in most of the later performances of the 'Rivals'—all too infrequent, alas!—they have been omitted altogether or disgraced by relegation to the background.

The vogue of Sentimental Comedy was waning when Sheridan wrote, and it disappeared before he died, yet the playgoers of London and of New York were becoming more tender-hearted than their ancestors who had delighted in the metallic harshness of character-delineation customary in Restoration comedy. They were beginning to look for characters with whom they could sympathize and to desire the villains to remain consistent in their villainy. They were unwilling to remain in what Lamb termed "the regions of pure comedy, where no cold moral reigns." Lamb called the 'School for Scandal' incongruous in that it is "a mixture of sentimental incompatibilities," Charles Surface being "a pleasant reality" while Joseph Surface was "a no less pleasant poetical foil to it."

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The original performer of Joseph was John Palmer; and Lamb asserted that it required his consummate art "to reconcile the discordant elements." Then the critic suggested, and this was a century ago, that

a player with Jack's talents, if we had one now, would not dare do the part in the same manner. He would instinctively avoid every turn which might tend to unrealize, and so to make the character fascinating. He must take his cue from the spectators, who would expect a bad man and a good man as rigidly opposed to each other as the death-beds of those geniuses are contrasted in the prints.

A little later in the same essay—the incomparable analysis of 'Artificial Comedy'—Lamb pointed out that "Charles must be loved and Joseph hated," adding that

to balance one disagreeable reality with another, Sir Peter Teazle must be no longer the comic idea of a fretful old bachelor bridegroom, whose teasings (while King played it) were evidently as much played off at you as they were meant to concern anybody on the stage,—he must be a real person, capable in law of sustaining an injury,—a person towards whom duties are to be acknowledged,—the genuine crim. con. antagonist of the villainous seducer Joseph. To realize him more, his sufferings under his unfortunate match must have the downright pungency of life,—must (or should) make you not mirthful but uncomfortable, just as the same predicament would move you in a neighbor or old friend.

I cannot count the number of occasions on which I have enjoyed the performance of the 'School for Scandal,'—but they must amount to a score at the least. I recall most clearly John Gilbert's Sir Peter; and I can testify that he had preserved the tradition of King. He was the fretful old bachelor bridegroom, who, when the screen fell and discovered Lady Teazle in the library of Joseph Surface, was wounded not in his heart but in his vanity. He preserved the comic idea, as Sheridan had designed. But John Gilbert was the only Sir Peter I can recall who was able to achieve this histrionic feat.

Of all the many Lady Teazles it has been my good fortune to see, Fanny Davenport stands out most sharply in my memory,—perhaps because she was the first I had ever beheld and perhaps because she was then in the springtime of her buoyant beauty. Certainly when the screen fell she was a lovely picture, like Niobe all tears. Her repentance was sincere beyond all question. She renounced the comic idea, which is that Lady Teazle has been caught in a compromising situation by the elderly husband with whom she is in the habit of quarrelling. Fanny Davenport saw only the pathos of the situation; and she made us see it and feel it and feel for her and hope that her impossible husband would accept her honest explanation,—the explanation which indeed he

would have to accept since we as eye-witnesses are ready to testify that it is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

But this rendering of the part is discomposing to the comic idea; and it forces a modification of method upon the actor of Charles Surface. It is in deference to the comic idea that when the screen falls Sheridan made Charles see the humor of the situation and only the humor of it. He is called upon to chaff Sir Peter and Lady Teazle and Joseph, one after the other. If the actor speaks these lines with due regard to the comic idea which created Sir Peter as a peevish old bachelor bridegroom and Lady Teazle as a frivolous woman of fashion, and if the actor of Sir Peter and the actress of Lady Teazle take the situation not only seriously but pathetically as they would in a twentieth century problem-play, then Charles's speech is heartless and almost brutal. Now Charles is a character as sympathetic to the audience in his way as Lady Teazle is in hers. Charles is to be loved as Joseph is to be hated. And so the impersonator of Charles is compelled to modify his method, to transpose his lines and to recognize that the robust raillery natural to him and appropriate to the predicament must be toned down in deference to our more delicate susceptibilities.

He laughs at Sir Peter first; and then he turns

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to Joseph, who is fair game and whom the spectators are glad to see held up to scorn. He says "you seem all to have been diverting yourselves here at hide and seek and I don't see who is out of the secret." With this he turns to Lady Teazle and asks, "Shall I beg your ladyship to inform me?" So saying he looks at her and perceiving that she is standing silent and ashamed, with downcast eyes, he makes her a bow of apology for his levity. Finally with another thrust at his brother, the unmasked hypocrite, he takes his departure airily, leaving them face to face. If the comic idea suffers from this contradiction of the intent of the comic dramatist, it must find what consolation it can in its sense of humor.

IV

A LARGE share of the success of even the masterpieces of the drama, comic and tragic, is due to the coincidence of its theme and its treatment with the desires, the opinions and the prejudices of the contemporary audiences for whose pleasure it was originally planned. But the play, comic or tragic, as the case may be, can survive through the ages (as the 'Merchant of Venice' and the 'School for Scandal' have survived) only if this compliance has not been subservient, if the play has the solidity of structure and the uni-

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versality of topic which will win it a welcome after its author is dead and gone. What is contemporary is three parts temporary, and what is up-to-date is certain soon to be out-of-date. Nevertheless it is always the audience of his own time and of his own place that the playwright has to please, first of all; and if their verdict is against him he has lost his case. Plays have their fates no less than books; and the dispensers of these fates are the spectators assembled in the playhouse. The dramatist who ignores this fact, or who is ignorant of it, does so at his peril. As Lowell once put it with his wonted pungency, "the pressure of public opinion is like the pressure of the atmosphere; you cannot see it, but it is sixteen pounds to the square inch all the same."

(1921).

IV

TRAGEDIES WITH HAPPY ENDINGS

IV

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I

IN Mrs. Wharton's acute and often penetrating analysis of 'French Ways and Their Meaning,' she dwelt upon the innate intellectual honesty of the French, "the special distinction of the race, which makes it the torch-bearer of the world"; and she asserted that Bishop Butler's celebrated declaration, "Things are what they are and will be as they will be," might have been "the motto of the French intellect." She called it "an axiom that makes dull minds droop, but exalts the brain imaginative enough to be amazed before the marvel of things as they are."

She pointed out that in Paris the people who go to the moving-pictures to gaze at an empty and external panorama are also the people who flock to the state-subsidized theaters, the *Français* and the *Odéon*, to behold the searching tragedies of Corneille and Racine, immitagably veracious in the portrayal of life as it is on the lofty plane of poetry:

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The people who assist at these grand tragic performances have a strong enough sense of reality to understand the part that grief and calamity play in life and in art; they feel instinctively that no real art can be based on a humbugging attitude toward life, and it is their intellectual honesty which makes them exact and enjoy its fearless representation.

This intellectual honesty Mrs. Wharton failed to find in the audiences of our American theaters, because it is not a habitual possession of Americans generally. And she ventured to quote a remark which she once heard Howells make on our theatrical taste. They had been talking about the pressure exerted upon the American playwright by the American playgoing public, compelling him to wind up his play, whatever its point of departure, with the suggestion that his hero and heroine lived happily ever after, like the prince and princess who are married off at the end of the fairy-tale. Mrs. Wharton declared that this predilection of our playgoers did not imply a preference for comedy, but that, on the contrary, "our audience wanted to be harrowed (and even slightly shocked) from eight till ten-thirty, and then consoled and reassured before eleven."

"Yes," said Howells, "what the American public wants is a tragedy—with a happy ending."

And Mrs. Wharton added her own comment

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that what Howells said of the American attitude in the theater "is true of the whole American attitude toward life." In other words we Americans both in the playhouse and out of it are lacking in the intellectual honesty which the French possess. We are not convinced, and we are not willing to let our plays, and even our novels, convince us, that "things are what they are and will be as they will be."

With the praise that Mrs. Wharton bestowed upon the French, no one who has profited by the masterpieces of French literature could cavil for a moment. The French are intellectually honest, more so than any other modern nation, and perhaps as much so as the Greeks. There is abundant insincerity in our drama and in our fiction; and no one long familiar with either is justified in denying this. But, none the less, Howells's characteristically witty remark has not perhaps all the weight which Mrs. Wharton attached to it. And it instantly evokes the desire to ask questions. Is it really true that we Americans like tragedies with happy endings? And, supposing this to be true, are we the only people who have ever revealed this aberration? Finally, if we have revealed it, are there any special reasons for this manifestation of our deficiency in intellectual honesty?

Having propounded these three queries, I pro-

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pose to answer them myself as best I can, and as the farseeing reader probably expected me to do; and it appears to me prudent to commence by considering the second of them, leaving the first to be taken up immediately thereafter. Are we Americans the only people who like tragedies with happy endings? Here we have a starting point for a discursive inquiry into the tastes of the playgoing public in other countries and in other centuries. Nor need we begin this leisurely loitering by too long a voyage, for we have only to go back a hundred years, more or less, and to tarry a little while in France itself.

II

IT was in the minor theatres of Paris at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth that there was slowly developed a new type of play, the melodrama. Its first masters were Ducange and Pixérécourt, who had profited by the experience of their ruder forerunners and who taught the secrets of their special craft to their more expert followers, the fertile Bouchardy, for one, and, for another, the only lately departed Dennery, the most adroit and the most inventive of them all.

A melodrama may be described briefly as a play with a plot and nothing but a plot; it

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abounds in situations enthralling, intricately combined and adroitly presented; and it contains characters simplified to types, drawn in profile and violently stencilled with the primary colors. It has a Hero, who struggles against his fate and struggles in vain until the final episode, when the Villain, as black as he is painted, is cast into outer darkness, the entirely white Hero being then rewarded for all his sufferings and for all his struggles with the hand of the equally pale Heroine, truly the female of his species. The melodrama may be devoid of veracity, but it is compelling in its progressive interest. It is dextrously devised to delight audiences which want "to be harrowed (and even slightly shocked) from eight to ten-thirty, and then consoled and reassured before eleven." In short, it is "a tragedy with a happy ending."

What could be more tragic than the tale of the 'Two Orphans'? In that ultimate masterpiece of melodrama, two lovely sisters, one of them blind, are severally lost in Paris in the wickedest days of the Regency. We are made to follow their appalling misadventures; and we behold them again and again in danger of death and worse than death. The sword of Damocles was suspended over their fair heads from the first rising of the curtain until within five minutes of its final fall. The odds are a hundred to one,

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nay, a thousand to one, against their escaping unscathed from their manifold perils. And yet, nevertheless, at the very end, the clouds lift, sunshine floods the stage; and the two heroines are left at last to live happy like two princesses with their two princes in the most entrancing of fairy tales. And many thousand Parisian audiences, laying aside their intellectual honesty for the occasion, dilated with the right emotion, sobbed at the sorrows of the sisters, cheered the rescuers and venomously hissed the villains who had pursued them.

So completely were the playgoers of Paris subdued to what they worked in, that the makers of melodrama were emboldened to strange tricks. Théophile Gautier once described a long-forgotten melodrama by Bouchardy, himself long forgotten, in which an important character was killed off in the third act. Then in the fifth act when the unfortunate but immaculate Hero was absolutely at the mercy of his vicious enemies, and when he could extricate himself from the toils only if he had the talisman he had been seeking in vain,—the needed password, the necessary key, the missing will, the incriminatory documents, or whatever you prefer—when all is lost, even honor, then in the very nick of time, the character who was killed off in the third act, and dead beyond all question, reappears and

gives the Hero the talisman (whatever it was). The Hero receives this with joy, commingled with surprise. "I thought you were dead!" he cries; "how is it that you are here now?" "Ah," answers the traveller from beyond, "that—that is a secret that I must carry back with me into the tomb!"

It is only fair to record that Parisian melodrama was not often as rude and as crude as this in its subterfuges and its expedients. Indeed, it sometimes rose to a far higher level, as in the 'Don César de Bazan' of Dennery and in the 'Lyons Mail' of Moreau, Giraudin and Delacour. It even served as the model for Victor Hugo's superb and sonorous 'Hernani' and 'Ruy Blas,' in which he flung the rich embroidered mantle of his ample lyricism over an arbitrary skeleton of deftly articulated intrigue, as artificial as it was ingenious.

In its earlier manifestations it was imitated in Great Britain, notably by Edward Fitzball, the first playmaker who perceived the theatrical possibilities of the legend of the 'Flying Dutchman.' Fitzball did not disdain to intimate that he considered himself the "Victor Hugo of England,"—which tempted Douglas Jerrold to remark that Fitzball was really only the "Victor No Go" of England. In its later manifestations the melodrama of the French supplied a pattern for the

'Silver King' of Henry Arthur Jones, one of the most satisfactory specimens of this type of play. The 'Silver King' won the high approval of Matthew Arnold, who called it an honest melodrama, relying necessarily "for its main effect on an outer drama of sensational incidents" and none the less attaining the level of literature because the dialog and the sentiments were natural.

By the side of the British 'Silver King' of Henry Arthur Jones may be set the American 'Secret Service' of William Gillette, which also relies for its main effect on an outer drama of sensational incidents; and yet the sensational incidents are so fitly chosen and so artfully interwoven that they serve to set off the very human hero, an accusable character, a Union spy, with a divided duty before him. Toward the end of the play it becomes evident that this brave and resourceful man is doomed to death; and to this fatality he is himself resigned, wilfully throwing away a chance to escape and welcoming a speedy exit from his impossible position. Yet, once more, just before the curtain falls, the dramatist intervenes, like a god from the machine, sparing his hero's life, and even permitting the spectators to foresee that hero and heroine will live happily ever after, thus consoling and reassuring the audience before eleven o'clock.

I make bold to say that this happy ending is

not inartistic and that it does not outrage our intellectual honesty, for the obvious reason that 'Secret Service' is not essentially a tragedy; it is a serio-comic story which never uplifts us to the serene atmosphere of the irresistible and the inevitable in which tragedy lives. It is too brisk in its humor, too lively in its representation of the externalities of life, to justify a fatal conclusion. A true tragedy must not only end sadly, it has also to begin sadly; it has to impress us subtly with a sense of impending disaster, inherent in its theme. What Stevenson said of the short-story, when that is as dramatic as it can be, is applicable to the drama itself. "Make another end to it?" he wrote in answer to a suggestion to that effect. "Ah, yes, but that is not the way I write; the whole tale is unified. To make another end, that is to make the beginning all wrong. . . . The body and end of a short-story is bone of the bone and blood of the blood of the beginning." In other words the beginning of a melodrama never demands a tragic ending, and rarely even permits it.

III

ALTHO modern melodrama was developed in the totally unliterary minor playhouses of Paris more than a hundred years ago, the playgoers of

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France had not had to wait until the early nineteenth century or even until the early eighteenth to be consoled and reassured by a tragedy with a happy ending. It was in the first half of the seventeenth century that Corneille took over from a Spanish original the first and fieriest of his tragedies, the 'Cid,'—the story of which leads up to one of the strongest situations in all dramatic literature. The duty is suddenly laid upon a high-strung warrior to fight a duel to the death with the father of the woman whom he loves and who loves him. Seemingly the deadly stroke of his sword has severed the lovers forever, for how could a woman wed the red-handed slayer of her father? Yet it is with this prospective wedding, abruptly brought about, that Corneille ends his play; and he was so dextrous a dramatist, so abundant in emotion and so persuasive in eloquence, that he was able to carry his audience with him, even at the cost of their intellectual honesty.

Nor did the playgoers of England have to await the importation of French melodrama in the original package before they could enjoy reassurance and consolation after being harrowed and even slightly shocked. Indeed, the Londoners had this pleasure provided for them even earlier than it had been vouchsafed to the Parisians. All students of the history of our stage

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are familiar with the type of play known as tragi-comedy. Its name sufficiently describes it, a name apparently first used in the prolog to a play by Plautus and revived by the Italian theorists of the theater. Dramas of this species sprang up spontaneously in Italy, in Spain and in France; and we find the form flourishing in England in the second half of the sixteenth century, altho it cannot be said to have been more popular among the English than it was among the French. Shakspeare's somber 'Measure for Measure' is the most immediately obvious example; and at the performance of this play the spectators were harrowed, and even more than slightly shocked, by a succession of powerful situations, only to be at last reassured and consoled by a happy ending, mechanically and unconvincingly brought about.

In the course of time tragi-comedy modified its methods and became the dramatic-romance, of which Beaumont and Fletcher's 'Philaster' may be taken as one characteristic specimen and Shakspeare's 'Cymbeline' as another. Perhaps it would be more exact to say that the dramatic-romance is only an insular sub-species of sentimental tragi-comedy. Most of the best known of the dramatic-romances of Beaumont and Fletcher (or of Fletcher and Massinger) conform to the definition of tragi-comedy, as Professor

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Ristine has skilfully condensed this from a defence of the type made by Guarini, author of the 'Pastor Fido':

Tragi-comedy, far from being a discordant mixture of tragedy and comedy, is a thorough blend of such parts of each as can stand together with verisimilitude, with the result that the deaths of tragedy are reduced to the danger of death, and the whole in every respect a graduated mean between the austerity and the dignity of the one and the pleasantness and ease of the other.

This Italian definition of Renaissance tragi-comedy can be transferred to modern melodrama of the more literary kind,—the 'Silver King,' for example, and 'Secret Service,' in which we find the graduated mean between austere dignity and easy pleasantness. After quoting from Guarini, Professor Ristine gave his own analysis of the elements combined in English tragi-comedy:

Love of some sort is the motive force; intrigue is rife; the darkest villainy is contrasted with the noblest and most exalted virtue. In the course of an action . . . in which the characters are enmeshed in a web of disastrous complications, reverse and surprise succeed each other with lightning rapidity. . . . But final disaster is ingeniously averted. . . . Wrongs are righted, reconciliation sets in, penitent villainy is forgiven, and the happy ending made complete.

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In its turn this American description of English tragi-comedy is applicable also to French melodrama of the less literary kind,—the ‘Lyons Mail’ and the ‘Two Orphans.’

It is possible to find at least one tragedy with a happy ending amid the two-score plays which alone have come down to us from all the hundreds acted in the Theater of Dionysus before the assembled citizens of Athens,—probably the most intelligent body of playgoers to which any dramatist has ever been privileged to appeal. The ‘Alcestis’ of Euripides is a beautiful play, grave, inspiring and moving; yet it has been a constant puzzle to the historians of Greek literature, who have never been quite able to declare what manner of tragic drama it is, since it has one character who is frankly humorous and since it has a happy ending,—the revivification of the pathetic heroine who had given her life to save her husband and who is brought back by Hercules, after a combat with Death.

IV

AFTER this desultory ramble through the history of the drama in other centuries and in other countries, we are in better case to consider the first of the three questions suggested by Mrs. Wharton’s assertion that we Americans are de-

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ficient in the intellectual honesty which is a recognized characteristic of the French. Is it really true that we like tragedies with happy endings? If it is true, we are no worse off than the English in the time of Shakspeare, the French in the time of Corneille and in the time of Hugo, the Greeks in the time of Euripides. But is it true?

It might be urged in our defence that we do not in the least object to the death of the hero and the heroine (or of both together) in the music-drama; and it must be admitted that in serious opera a tragic ending is not only acceptable but is actually expected. It might be pointed out that the final death of the heroine has never in any way interfered with the immense popularity of a host of star-plays, 'Adrienne Lecouvreur,' the 'Dame aux Camélias,' 'Froufrou,' 'Théodora' and 'La Tosca.' It might be permissible to record that the death of 'Cyrano de Bergerac,' (a fatal termination not inherent in the theme of that heroic comedy and in fact almost inconsistent,) did not dampen the pleasure of the American playgoer.

These things must be taken for what they are worth; and perhaps they are not really pertinent to our immediate inquiry, since opera is a very special form of the dramatic art, making an appeal of its own within arbitrary limits, and since a star-play is relished by the majority largely as

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a vehicle for the exhibition of the histrionic versatility of the star herself or himself, a last dying speech and confession affording the performer an excellent opportunity for the display of his or her virtuosity.

We must go behind Mrs. Wharton's rather too sweeping accusation and center attention on a single point. American playgoers of to-day enjoy and hugely enjoy seeing on the stage stories which are harrowing, which deal liberally with life and death, and which after all end happily, sending us home consoled and reassured. So have the playgoers of other lands in other times; and the real question is whether we refuse to accept the tragic end when this is ordained by all that has gone before, when it is a fate not to be escaped. In other words, have we the intellectual honesty which shall compel us to accept George Eliot's stern declaration that "consequences are unpitying"?

Thus put, the question is not easy to answer.

For myself I am inclined to think that when we are at liberty to choose between the happy and the unhappy ending, when one or the other is not imposed upon us by the action or by the atmosphere of the story set before us, we tend to prefer a conclusion which dismisses the hero and the heroine to a vague future felicity. But I am inclined also to believe that we do not

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shrink from the bitterest end if this has been foreordained from the beginning of time, if the author has been skilful enough and sincere enough to make us feel that his tragedy could not possibly have any other than a tragic termination.

In the 'Second Mrs. Tanqueray' the fatal ending is obligatory; it grows out of the nature of things; and the play has established itself. In 'Mid-Channel' there is no way out of the difficulty in which the heroine has entangled herself, except through the door of death. On the other hand, the plot of the 'Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith' cried aloud for a tragic ending, which the author refused to grant; and perhaps this is one reason why the piece has never taken hold on our play-going public despite its indisputable qualities.

As it happens there have been seen on our stage in the first and second decades of the twentieth century four plays, unequal in sincerity and different in texture, but all of them variants of the same theme. Two are British, 'Iris' by Sir Arthur Pinero, and the 'Fugitive' by John Galsworthy; and two are American, the 'Easiest Way' by Eugene Walter and 'Déclassée' by Miss Zoe Akins. In each of them we are invited to follow the career of a young woman who loves luxury and who moves through life along the line of least resistance, until at last the

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ground gives way beneath her feet. 'Iris' was the first of the four; it is the most delicately artistic and the most veracious. The 'Easiest Way' is perhaps the most vigorous. The 'Fugitive' is pallid and futile. 'Déclassée' is the least important of them all, as it is the least original. The two last-named pieces are unsatisfactory when we bring them to the bar of our intellectual honesty; and yet they both end with the death of the heroine, an arbitrary exit out of the moral entanglements in which she has involved herself. The two earlier plays have a more truly tragic ending, since they leave the heroine alive yet bereft of all that makes life worth living. No one of the four sent the spectators home reassured and consoled.

V

THERE might seem to be no necessity to put the third question now that the second has been discussed. And yet there may be profit in asking ourselves whether there are any special reasons why the American playgoing public might be expected to lapse from intellectual honesty and to compel our playwrights to violate the logic of their stories and to stultify themselves to achieve a puerile fairy-tale conclusion. Mrs. Wharton put forward one such reason, when she

asserted that our attitude in the theater is characteristic "of the whole American attitude toward life." Here she is drawing an indictment against the American people and not merely against American playgoers.

To enter upon that broad problem would take me too far afield, too far, that is, from the theater itself, within the walls of which this inquiry must be confined. Are there any conditions in the American theater which make against the sincere and searching portrayal of life? I must confess that I think there is at least one such condition, the possible consequences of which are disquieting. This is the change in the composition of the audiences in our American theaters from what they were half-a-century ago—which is as far back as my own memories as a playgoer extend. I think that the average age of the spectators is now considerably less than it was when I was a play-struck boy; and I think also that the proportion of women is distinctly larger than it was in those distant days. If I am right in believing that this change has taken place, and also in anticipating that it is likely to be even more evident in the years that are to come, then there will probably be brought about a slow but certain modification of those implicit desires and of those explicit prejudices of his expected audience, which the playwright has always taken

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into account even if he is often more or less unconscious that he is so doing.

Water cannot rise higher than its source; and the dramatist cannot soar too loftily above the level of the audience he has to allure. It is always the duty of the dramatist to find the common denominator of the throng. He need not write down to his public, but he must write broad; or otherwise he will fail to arouse and retain the interest of the spectators. If he shrinks from the toil of so presenting his vision of our common humanity that it shall be immediately attractive to his audiences then he is no dramatist, whatever else he may be; and he had better turn at once to sonneteering and to storywriting, arts wherein he can appeal to a chosen few. The theater is for the many-headed multitude; and the theater-poet cannot but accept the condition that confronts him.

If American audiences are younger than they were, then they are not so rich in knowledge of the world, not so ripe in judgment. If they are also more largely feminine, then they will be different from what they have been in the days when the drama attained to its superbest expression. The tragedies of Sophocles were represented in the Theater of Dionysus before the citizens of Athens; and the spectators were all men of more or less maturity. The tragedies

and the comedies of Shakspeare were written for the Globe Theater in London, in which the spectators were predominantly male. The comedies of Molière were acted in the Palais Royal Theater in Paris, before audiences which included comparatively few women. It is significant that women were admitted to the orchestra seats of the Théâtre Français only about forty years ago; and that Sarcey, a very shrewd observer of things theatrical, was moved more than once to record his regret that this had helped to bring about the more rapid dispersal of the group of old playgoers, experts in playwriting and in acting, who were wont to follow the performances of the Comédie-Française assiduously and devotedly.

And it was almost a hundred years ago that Goethe anticipated Sarcey's complaint. "What business have young girls in the theater?" he asked. "They do not belong to it; . . . the theater is only for men and women, who know something of human affairs."

But "things are what they are, and will be what they will be."

(1919)

V

ON THE ADVANTAGE OF HAVING A
PATTERN

V

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I

NO passage of Stevenson's has been oftener quoted than his confession how he taught himself the art of letters by playing "the sedulous ape to many masters"; and in this avowal he had been preceded by masters of style as dissimilar in their accomplishment as Franklin and Newman. Stevenson may be overstating the case—he had caught the trick of over-statement from Thoreau—but he is not misstating it when he asserts that this is the only way to learn to write. Certainly it is an excellent way, if we judge by its results in his own case, in Franklin's and in Newman's. The method of imitative emulation will help any apprentice of the craft to choose his words, to arrange them in sentences and to build them up in coherent paragraphs. It is a specific against that easy writing which is "cursed hard reading." But it goes no deeper than the skin, since it affords insufficient support

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when the novice has to consider his structure as a whole, the total form he will bestow upon his essay, his story, his play.

In the choice of the proper framework for his conception the author's task is made measurably lighter if he can find a fit pattern ready to his hand. Whether he shall happen upon this when he needs it is a matter of chance, since it depends on what the engineers call "the state of the art." There have been storytellers and playwrights not a few who have gone astray and dissipated their energies, not through any fault of their own, but solely because no predecessor had devised a pattern suitable for their immediate purpose. They have wandered afield because the trail had not been blazed by earlier, and possibly less gifted, wayfarers and adventurers.

Perhaps I can make clear what I mean by a concrete example not taken from the art of letters. In Professor John C. Van Dyke's acute analysis of the traditions of American painting, he has told us that when La Farge designed the 'Ascension' for the church of that name in New York,

The architectural place for it was simplified by placing on the chancel wall of the church a heavily gilded moulding, deep-niched, and with an arched top, which acted at once both as a frame and a limit to the picture. The space was practically that of a huge window with

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a square base and a half-top requiring for its filling two groups of figures one above the other. La Farge placed his standing figures of the apostles and the holy women in the lower space and their perpendicular lines paralleled the uprights of the frame; at the top he placed an oval of angels about the risen Christ, and again the rounded lines of the angel group repeated the curves of the gilded arch.

Then Professor Van Dyke appends this significant comment:

There was no great novelty in this arrangement. It was frankly adopted from Italian Renaissance painting and had been used for high altar-pieces by all the later painters—Andrea del Sarto, Raphael, Titian, Palma. They had worked out the best way of filling that upright-and-arched space, and La Farge followed the tradition because he recognized its sufficiency.

In other words, the art of painting had so far advanced that La Farge was supplied with the pattern best suited to his purpose; and this pattern once accepted, he was at liberty to paint the picture as he saw it, without wasting time in quest of another construction. The picture he put within that frame was his and his only, even if the pattern of it had been devised centuries before he was born. In thus utilizing a framework invented by his predecessors he was not cramped and confined; rather was he set free. So it is that to Milton and to Wordsworth the

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rigidity of the sonnet was not a hindrance but a help—especially to Wordsworth since it curbed his tendency to diffuseness. Wordsworth himself declared his delight in the restrictions of the sonnet:

In truth the prison into which we doom
Ourselves no prison is: and hence for me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be),
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace here, as I have found.

That utterance of Wordsworth's may be recommended to the ardent advocates of Free Verse,—that is, of the verse which boasts itself to be patternless and to come into being in response solely to the whim of the moment. Sooner or later the Free Versifiers will discover the inexorable truth in Huxley's saying that it is when a man can do as he pleases that his trouble begins.

Since I have ventured these three quotations I am emboldened to make a fourth—from John Morley's essay on Macaulay. After informing us about the rules which Comte imposed on himself in composition, Morley tells us that Comte

justified his literary solicitude by insisting on the wholesomeness alike to heart and intelligence of submission to artificial restrictions. He felt, after he had

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once mastered the habit of the new yoke, that it became the source of continual and unforeseeable improvement even in thought, and he perceived that the reason why verse is a higher kind of literary perfection than prose, is that verse imposes a greater number of rigorous forms.

It is because of their rigorous forms that the ballade and the rondeau have established themselves by the side of the sonnet; and the lyrist who has learnt to love them finds in their fixity no curb on his power of self-expression. So in the kindred art of music, the sonata and the symphony are forms each with a law of its own; yet the composer has abundant liberty within the law. He has all the freedom that is good for him; and the prison to which he dooms himself no prison is.

II

THERE is however a difference between a fixed form, such as the sonata has and the sonnet, and the more flexible formula, such as the arrangement within a framework which La Farge borrowed from the painters of the Italian Renaissance. A pattern of this latter sort is less rigid; in fact, it is easily varied as successive artists modify it to suit themselves.

Consider the eighteenth century essay which Steele devised with the aid of hints he found in

the 'Epistles' and even in the 'Satires' of Horace, and which was enriched and amplified by Addison. The pattern of the 'Tatler' and the 'Spectator' was taken over by a heterogeny of other essayists in the course of four-score years, notably by Johnson in the 'Idler' and the 'Rambler'; and assuredly Johnson if left to himself could never have invented a formula so simple, so unpretending and so graceful. It was only a little departed from by Goldsmith, and only a little more by Irving in the 'Sketch-Book,' which is not so much a periodical (altho it was originally published in parts) as it is a portfolio of essays and of essay-like tales. From Irving, Thackeray borrowed more than the title of his 'Paris Sketch-Book' and 'Irish Sketch-Book.'

Consider the earlier and in some measure stricter form of the essay as it had been developed by Montaigne,—the pattern that Montaigne worked out as he put more and more of himself into the successive editions of his essays. He had begun intending little more than a commonplace-book of anecdotes and quotations; and yet by incessant interpolation and elaboration his book became at last the intimate revelation of his own pungent individuality. This is the pattern that Bacon adopted and adapted to his purpose, less discursive and more monitory, but not less pregnant nor less significant. And it is

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Montaigne's formula, not greatly transformed by Bacon, which Emerson found ready to his hand when he made his essays out of his lectures, scattering his pearls of wisdom with a lavish hand and not pausing to string them into a necklace. We cannot doubt that the pattern of Montaigne and Bacon and Emerson owed something also to their memory of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius.

Shakspeare was as fortunate as Bacon in the fact that he had not to waste time in vainly seeking new forms. He did not invent the sonnet and he did not invent the sonnet-sequence; but he made his profit out of them. Neither the stanza nor the structure of his two narrative poems, 'Venus and Adonis' and the 'Rape of Lucrece,' was of his contriving; he found them already in use and he did not go in search of any overt novelty of form.

Scott, "beaten out of poetry by Byron," as he himself phrased it, turned to prose-fiction; and almost by accident he created the pattern of the historical novel, with its romantic heroes and heroines and with its realistic humbler characters. His earliest heroes and heroines in prose were very like his still earlier heroes and heroines in verse; and his realistic characters were the result of his expressed desire to do for the Scottish peasant what Miss Edgeworth had done for the Irish peasant. The first eight of the Waverley

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novels dealt only with Scottish scenes; then in 'Ivanhoe,' and a little later in 'Quentin Durward,' Scott enlarged his formula for the presentation of an English and a French theme.

Since Scott's day his pattern has approved itself to three generations of novelists; and it is not yet outworn. In France Victor Hugo and Alexander Dumas accepted it, each of them altering it at will, feeling free to adjust it to their own differing necessities. In Italy it was employed by Manzoni, in Poland by Sinckiewicz; and in Germany by a horde of uninspired storytellers. In the United States it was at once borrowed by Cooper for the 'Spy,' the first American historical novel. Then Cooper, having proved its value, took the pattern which Scott had created for the telling of a story the action of which took place on land, and in the 'Pilot' made it serve for a story the action of which took place mainly on the sea,—perhaps a more striking originality than his contemporaneous employment of it for a series of tales the action of which took place in the forest.

It is one of the most fortunate coincidences in the history of literature that Scott crossed the border and made a foray into English history at the very moment when Cooper was ready to write fiction about his own country; and it was almost equally unfortunate that Charles Brock-

den Brown was born too early to be able to avail himself of the pattern Scott and Cooper were to handle triumphantly. Brown died a score of years before the publication of 'Ivanhoe.' He left half-a-dozen novels of varying value, known only to devoted students of American fiction. He had great gifts; he had invention and imagination; he was a keen observer of human nature; he had a rich faculty of description. (In one of his books there is a portrayal of an epidemic of yellow fever in Philadelphia which almost challenges comparison with De Foe's 'Journal of the Plague Year'.) But "the state of the art" of fiction supplied Brown with no model appropriate to his endowment; and therefore he had to do the best he could with the unworthy pattern of the Gothic Romance of Horace Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe and of their belated followers, "Monk" Lewis and Godwin. If Brown had been a contemporary of Cooper, then the author of the 'Last of the Mohicans' might have had a worthy rival in his own country.

The state of the art in his own time was a detriment to a far greater story-teller than Brown or Cooper or Scott, to one of the greatest of all story-tellers, to Cervantes. 'Don Quixote' abides as the imperishable monument to his genius, to his wisdom, to his insight, to his humor, to his all-embracing sympathy. None the

less is it sprawling in its construction and careless in its composition. There were only two models available for Cervantes when he wrote this masterpiece of fiction, the Romance of Chivalry and its antithesis, the Romance of Roguery—the picaresque tale. The Romance of Chivalry was generally chaotic and involute, with a plot at once complicated and repetitious. The Romance of Roguery, born of an inevitable reaction against the highflown and toplofty unreality of the interminable narratives of knight-errantry, was quite as straggling in its episodes; and it was also addicted to cruel and brutal practical joking. For Cervantes these were unworthy patterns; and he had no other. So it is that the method of ‘Don Quixote’ is sometimes unsatisfactory, even when the manner is always beyond all cavil. Moreover, it is evident that Cervantes builded better than he knew; he seems not to have suspected the transcendent quality of his own work; and therefore he did not take his task as seriously as he might. As it has been well said, Cervantes came too early to profit by Cervantes.

How much luckier are the novelists and short-story writers of to-day! The state of the art has advanced to a point unforeseen even a century ago. Whatever theme a writer of fiction may want to treat now, he is never at a loss for

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a pattern, which will preserve him from the misadventure which befell Cervantes. In its methods, if in nothing else, fiction is a finer art than it was once upon a time. Consider Rudyard Kipling, for example, who is almost infinitely various, and who is always inexpugnably original. Whatever his subject might be, there was always an appropriate pattern at his service; he had only to pick and choose that which best suited his immediate need. Consider Stevenson, again, and how he was able to play the sedulous ape at one time to Scott and Dumas, and at another to Hawthorne and Poe.

III

It is perhaps in the field of playmaking that the utility of the pattern is most obvious. Sophocles modeled himself on Aeschylus, and then modified the formula in his own favor. Calderon took over the pattern that Lope de Vega had developed and the younger playwright departed from it only infrequently. Racine modeled himself upon Corneille; and then transformed the formula he borrowed in obedience to his own genius. Victor Hugo took the theatrically effective (but psychologically empty) pattern of contemporary Parisian melodrama and draped its bare bones with his glittering lyricism. Maeter-

linck took the traditional formula of the fairy-play, the *féerie*, and endowed it with the poetic feeling which delights us in the 'Blue Bird.' Oscar Wilde took the framework of Scribe and Sardou; and he was thus enabled adroitly to complicate the situations of 'Lady Windermere's Fan.'

Then there is Ibsen, whose skilful construction has demanded the praise of all students of the art and mystery of playmaking. He started where Scribe and Sardou left off. The earliest of his social dramas, the 'League of Youth,' is in accord with the pattern of Augier and the younger Dumas. The next, the 'Doll's House,' might have been composed by Sardou—up to the moment in the final act when husband and wife sit down on opposite sides of the table to talk out their future relation. Thereafter Ibsen evolved from this French pattern a pattern of his own which was exactly suited to his later social dramas and which has in its turn been helpful to the more serious dramatists of to-day.

As Shakspeare had been content to take the verse-forms of his predecessors and contemporaries, so he never hesitated to employ their playmaking formulas. Kyd had developed the type of play which we call the tragedy-of-blood; and Shakspeare borrowed it for his 'Titus Andronicus' (if this is his, which is more than

doubtful) and even for his 'Hamlet,' wherein it is purged of most of its violence. Marlowe lifted into literature the unliterary and loosely knit chronicle-play; and Shakspeare enlarged this formula in 'Richard III' and 'Richard II.' It was in his youth that Shakspeare trod in the trail of Kyd and Marlowe; and in his maturity he followed in the footsteps of his younger friends, Beaumont and Fletcher, taking the pattern of their dramatic-romance for his 'Winter's Tale' and 'Cymbeline.' Due perhaps to the fact that the state of the art did not provide him with a pattern for what has been called high-comedy, Shakspeare did not attempt any searching study of Elizabethan society,—altho, of course, this may have been because Elizabethan society was lacking in the delicate refinements of fashion which are the fit background of high-comedy.

Whatever the explanation may be, it was left for Molière, inspired by the external elegancies of the court of Louis XIV, to create the pattern of high-comedy in 'Tartuffe' and the 'Misanthrope' and the 'Femmes Savantes,'—the pattern which was to serve Congreve for the 'Way of the World,' Sheridan for the 'School for Scandal,' Augier and Sandeau for the 'Gendre de Monsieur Poirier.' And Molière really created the formula, with little or no help from any earlier dramatists, either Greek or Latin.

Neither in Athens nor in Rome was there the atmosphere of breeding which might have stimulated Menander or Terence to the composition of comedies of this distinction. It is the more remarkable that Molière should have accomplished this feat, since he sought no originality of form in his earlier efforts, contenting himself with the loose and liberal framework of the Italian improvized plays, the comedy-of-masks.

One of the many reasons for the sterility of the English drama in the middle of the nineteenth century is that the dramatists of our language seem to have believed it their duty to abide by the patterns which had been acceptable to the Jacobean and Restoration audiences and which were not appropriate to the theater of the nineteenth century, widely different in its size and in its scenic appliances. The English poets apparently despised the stage of their own time; and they made no effort to master its methods. As a result they wrote dramatic poems and not poetic dramas. They did not follow the example of Victor Hugo and lift into literature a type of play which was unliterary. Stevenson, in his unfortunate adventures into playmaking, made the unpardonable mistake of trying to varnish with style a dramatic formula which had long ceased to be popular.

In the past half-century the men of letters of

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our language have seen a great light. They have no contempt for the dramatic patterns of approved popularity; and of these there are now a great many, suitable for every purpose and adjustable to every need. They have found out how to be theatrically effective without ceasing to be literary in the best sense of the word,—that is to say, they are not relying on “fine writing” but on clear thinking and on the honest presentation of human nature, as they severally see it.

(1921)

VI

DID SHAKSPERE WRITE PLAYS TO FIT
HIS ACTORS?

VI

DID SHAKSPERE WRITE PLAYS TO FIT HIS ACTORS?

I

IN his consideration of the organization of the Elizabethan dramatic companies Professor Alwin Thaler pointed out that the company of the Globe Theater in London, to which Shakspeare belonged, continued to contain the same actors year after year, the secessions and the accessions being few and far between; and he explained that this was "because its members were bound to one another by ties of devoted personal friendship." He noted that he had "emphasized the influence exerted upon Shakspeare the playwright by his intimate knowledge of the men for whom his work was written, and there can be no doubt that in working out some of his greatest characters he must have remembered that Burbage was to act them." Then Professor Thaler filed a caveat, so to speak.

But the Shakspeare muse was not of that sorry sort which produces made-to-order garments to fit the tastes

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and idiosyncrasies of a single star. Far from being one-man plays, the dramas were written for a great company of actors. . . . And Richard Burbage, I imagine, would have had little inclination to surrender his place among his peers for the artificial and idolatrous solitude of modern starhood.

In this last sentence Mr. Thaler confuses the issue. The question is not whether Burbage wanted to go starring, supported by a more or less incompetent company, but whether Shakspere did on occasion choose to write a play which is in fact a made-to-order garment to fit the idiosyncrasies of a single star. And when it is put in this way the question is easy to answer. We know that Burbage played Richard III, and if there ever was a star-part, if there ever was a one-man play, if there ever was a piece cut and stitched to the measure of the man who first performed it, then it is Richard III. Here we have a dominating character to whom the other characters are sacrificed; he is etched with bold strokes, whereas most of the others are only faintly outlined. So long as Richard is powerfully seized and rendered, then the rest of the acting is relatively unimportant. Richard is the whole show. And while there is only a single star-part in Richard III—Eclipse first and the rest nowhere—there are twin star-parts in Macbeth, who are vigorously drawn, while the re-

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maining characters are merely brushed in, as Professor Bradley has noted.

Now, if this proves that Shakspeare's muse was of a sorry sort, then that heavenly visitor is in no worse case than the muse of many another dramatist. Sophocles is reported to have devised his great tragic parts specially for one actor, whose name has not come down to us. Racine wrote 'Phèdre' and 'Andromaque,' his masterpieces, for Mlle. de Champmeslé. Rostand wrote 'Cyrano de Bergerac' and 'Chantecler' for Coquelin. Sardou wrote 'Fédora' and 'Théodora' for Sarah Bernhardt. The younger Dumas wrote the 'Visite de Noces' for Desclée. Giacommetti wrote 'Maria Antoinette' for Ristori and the 'Morte Civile' for Salvini. D'Annunzio wrote the 'Gioconda' and the 'Citta Morte' for Duse. Bulwer-Lytton wrote the 'Lady of Lyons' and 'Richelieu' for Macready. Gilbert wrote 'Comedy and Tragedy' for Mary Anderson. Legouvé has told us in detail the circumstances which led to his writing (in collaboration with Scribe) 'Adrienne Lecouvreur' for Rachel. Jules Lemaître has told us how and why he came to compose his 'Age Difficile' for Coquelin; and Augustus Thomas has told us how he came to compose his 'In Mizzoura' for Goodwin. The line stretches out to the crack of doom. When Shakspeare chose to produce made-

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to-order garments to fit the idiosyncrasies of a single actor, he was in very good company, ancient and modern. And we may go further and assert that very few of these plays are any the worse because they were made-to-order.

The great dramatists, whose works we analyze reverently in the study, were all of them, in their own time, successful playwrights, stimulated now and again by association with the most gifted and the most accomplished of contemporary actors. If they had not made their profit out of the histrionic ability of the foremost performers of their own time and country, they would have been neglecting golden opportunities.

Those who best know the conditions of play-writing will be the least likely to deny that not a few of the great characters in the drama came into being originally as parts for great actors. Of course, these characters are more than parts; they transcend the endowment of any one performer; they have complexity and variety; they are vital and accusable human beings; but they were parts first of all more or less made-to-order. In many cases we know the name of the actor for whose performance the character was conceived, Burbage for one, Mlle. de Champsmelé for a second, Coquelin for a third. And in many another case we lack definite knowledge and are left to conjecture. There are peculiarities in the

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'Medea' of Euripides, for instance, which seem to me to point to the probability that it also was a made-to-order garment.

To say that Sophocles and Euripides possibly did this cutting-to-fit, that Shakspeare and Racine and Rostand indisputably did it, is not to imply that they did it always or even that they did it often. Perhaps they did it more often than we shall ever know; perhaps they had special actors in mind when they created characters which are not star-parts. And this suggests a broadening of the inquiry.

II

AFTER asserting that Shakspeare's were "far from being one-man plays," Professor Thaler reminded us that Shakspeare's dramas were written "for a great company of actors"; and what is true of Shakspeare

holds good also of the Elizabethan drama in general. Its breadth and variety may be ascribed in no slight degree to the fact that the organization of the dramatic companies provided the great poets of a great age with ample facilities for the interpretation of many characters and many phases of life.

This prompts a question as to whether Shakspeare may not have fitted other actors who were his associates at the Globe Theater besides Bur-

bage. That he did deliberately and repeatedly take the measure of the foremost performer in the company and that his dramatic genius was stimulated by the histrionic talent of Burbage, I do not doubt. We cannot help seeing that Shakspeare's heroes become older as Burbage himself advanced in years, Romeo being intended for a fiery young fellow and Lear being composed for a maturer man, who had become a more consummate artist. I have suggested elsewhere the possibility—to my own mind a probability—that Shakspeare inserted the part of Jaques into 'As You Like It' specially for Burbage. Shakspeare took his sequence of incidents from Lodge's 'Rosalynd,' in which there is no character which resembles Jaques; and Jaques has nothing to do with the plot; he remains totally outside the story; he exists for his own sake; and he may very well have been thrust into 'As You Like It' because Burbage was too important an actor to be left out of the cast and because Orlando was not the kind of part in which Burbage at that period of his artistic development would appear to best advantage.

If Shakspeare made parts thus adjusted to the chief performer at the Globe Theater, may he not also have proportioned other and less important characters to the capabilities of one or another of the actors whose histrionic endowment

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he was in the best possible position to appreciate aptly, since he was acting every day by their side? Is this something to which the greatest of dramatists would scorn to descend? Has this ever been done by any other playwright in all the long history of the stage?

When we turn the pages of that history in search of support for this suggestion, we find it abundantly and super-abundantly. The succession of comic operas which Gilbert devised to be set to music by Sullivan reveal at once that they were contrived with reference to the capacity and to the characteristics of the chief members of the company at the Savoy Theater. The sequence of broadly humorous pieces, farces which almost rose to be comedies and comedies which almost relaxed into farces, written by Labiche, and by Meilhac and Halévy for the Palais Royal theater were all of them so put together as to provide appropriate parts for the quartet of comedians who made that little house the home of perennial laughter in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

At the same time Meilhac and Halévy were contriving for the Variétés the librettos of 'Barbe-Bleue' and the 'Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein,' 'Belle Hélène' and 'La Périchole,' a series of opera-bouffes enhanced by the scintillating rhythms of Offenbach and adroitly adapted to

the special talents of Schneider, of Dupuis and of several of the other more or less permanent members of the company. Almost simultaneously Augier and the younger Dumas were giving to the Comédie-Française their social dramas, always carefully made-to-order to suit the half-dozen leading members of the brilliant company Perrin was then guiding. The 'Fourchambault' of Augier and the 'Étrangère' of Dumas are masterpieces of this profitable utilization of the pronounced personalities of the performers. The 'Étrangère,' in particular, would have been a very different play if it had not contained characters made-to-order for Sarah Bernhardt and Croizette, Got and Coquelin.

A little earlier the series of blank verse plays written by Gilbert for the Haymarket Theater, of which 'Pygmalion and Galatea' won the most protracted popularity, had their leading characters plainly made-to-order for Mr. and Mrs. Kendal and for Buckstone himself. And just as 'Richard III' and 'King Lear' are none the worse because the central character was conceived also as an acting part for Burbage, so Gilbert's blank verse pieces, Augier's social dramas, Meilhac and Halévy's farcical comedies lost nothing by their owing some portion of their inspiration to the necessity of fitting the accomplished comedians by whom the outstanding characters were to be

impersonated. I venture to express the opinion that this desire to bring out the best the several actors had to give was helpful rather than not, stimulatingly suggestive to the author when he was setting his invention to work.

When we turn back the pages of stage-history from the nineteenth century to the eighteenth we find perhaps the most striking of all instances of made-to-order parts,—an instance which shows us not one or two or three characters in a play, but almost every one of them, composed and elaborated with an eye single to the original performers. The ‘School for Scandal’ has been seen by hundreds and read by thousands, who have enjoyed its effective situations, its sparkling dialog and its contrasted characters, without any suspicion that the persons of the play were made-to-order parts. Yet this undisputed masterpiece of English comedy is what it is because its clever author had succeeded to the management of Drury Lane, where Garrick had gathered an incomparable company of comedians; and in writing the ‘School for Scandal’ Sheridan peopled his play with the characters which the members of this company could personate most effectively.

King was Sir Peter, Mrs. Abington was Lady Teazle, Palmer was Joseph Surface, Smith was Charles Surface; and they were so perfectly fitted that they played with effortless ease. So

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closely did Sheridan identify the parts with the performers that when a friend asked him why he had written a five-act comedy ending in the marriage of Charles and Maria without any love-scene for this couple, he is reported to have responded: "But I couldn't do it. Smith can't make love—and nobody would want to make love to Priscilla Hopkins!"

III

It may be objected that Sheridan and Augier and Dumas were after all dextrous playwrights and that they are no one of them to be ranked with the truly great dramatists. While they might very well be willing once in a way to turn themselves into dramaturgic tailors, this is a servile complaisance of which the mighty masters of the drama would never be guilty, from which indeed they would shrink with abhorrence. But if we turn the pages of stage-history still further back, from the eighteenth century to the seventeenth, we discover that Molière did this very thing, the adjustment of a whole play to the actors who were to perform it, not once as Sheridan did, but repeatedly and regularly and in all his pieces, in his loftiest comedies no less than his broadest and most boisterous farces. And there will be found few competent critics to deny

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that Molière is one of the supreme leaders of the drama, with an indisputable right to a place by the side of Sophocles and Shakspeare, even if he does not climb to the austere and lofty heights of tragedy.

The more we know about the art of the theater and the more we study the plays of Molière the more clearly do we perceive that he was compelled to do persistently what Sheridan did only once. The company at the Palais Royal was loyal to Molière; nearly all its leading members came to Paris with him and remained with him until his death fifteen years later. This company was strictly limited in number; and as it had a permanent repertory and stood ready to appear in any of its more successful plays at a moment's notice, outside actors could not be engaged for any special part,—even if there had then been in Paris any available performers at liberty. Molière could not have more parts in any of his pieces than there were members of the company; and he could not put into any of his pieces any character for which there was not a competent performer in the company. No doubt, he must at times have felt this to be a grievous limitation. That he never deals with maternal love may be accounted for by the fact that he had no woman to play agreeable “old women,”—the disagreeable elderly females being

still played by men, in accord with the medieval tradition. We know the name of the male actor who appeared as Madame Pernelle in 'Tartuffe,' as the wife in the 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme' and as the Comtesse d'Escarbagnas.

Molière wrote many parts for his own acting; and as he was troubled with a frequent cough, he sometimes makes coughing a characteristic of the person he was to act. His brother-in-law, Béjart, was lame; and so Molière describes a character written for this actor as having a limp. His sister-in-law, Madeleine Béjart, was an actress of authority; and so the serving maids he wrote for her are domineering and provocative. But when she died and her place was taken by a younger actress with an infectious laugh, the serving maids in all the plays that Molière wrote thereafter are not authoritative, and they are given occasion for repeated cachinnation. And as this recruit, Mlle. Beauval, had a clever little daughter, Molière did not hesitate to compose a part for a child in his 'Malade Imaginaire.' When we have familiarized ourselves with the record of the leading man, La Grange, of Madeleine Béjart, of Catherine de Brie, and of Armande Béjart (Molière's wife), we find it difficult to study the swift succession of comedies without constantly feeling the presence of the actors inside the characters written for them. We recog-

nize that it was not a matter of choice this fitting of the parts to the performers; it was a matter of necessity; and even if it may have irked him at times, Molière made the best of it and probably found his profit in it.

Now Shakspeare was subject to the same limitations as Molière. He composed all his plays for one company, the membership of which was fairly constant during a score of years and more. It was also a repertory company with frequent changes of bill. It could never be strengthened by the special engagement of an unattached performer; it had to suffice, such as it was. So far as we can judge by the scant external evidence and by the abundant internal evidence of the plays written for them by Shakspeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and the rest, the company was composed of unusually competent performers. It is unthinkable that Shakspeare should have plotted his superb series of tragedies, making more and more exacting demands on the impersonators of his tragic heroes, unless he had a confident assurance that Burbage would be equal to them. And this confidence could not fail to be a stimulus to him, encouraging him to seek out stories for the ample display of his friend's great gifts.

From all we have learnt of late about Shakspeare we are justified in believing that he was a

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shrewd man of affairs with a keen eye to the main chance. He was a sharer in the takings at the door; and he could not but know that those plays are most attractive to the public which contain the most parts demanding and rewarding good acting. So we must infer that he put into his plays the characters in which he judged that his comrades could appear to best advantage. He not only wrote good parts for good actors, he wrote special parts for special actors, shaping his characters to the performers who were to impersonate them. In other words he provided, and he had to provide, made-to-order garments.

That he did this repeatedly and regularly, just as Molière was to do it three-quarters of a century later on the other side of the channel, is plainly evident, altho we do not now know the special qualifications of his actors as well as we do those of Molière's. But we cannot doubt that the company contained one actor of villains, of "heavies" as they are termed in the theater. I hazard a guess that this was Condell, afterwards the associate of Heming in getting out the First Folio; but whoever he was, Condell or another, he was entrusted with Iago, with Edmund in 'King Lear,' with the King in 'Hamlet,' and with the rest of Shakspeare's bold, bad men.

We know that there were two low comedians in the company, who appeared as the two Dro-

mios, as the two Gobbos, as Launce and Speed; and we know also that one of these was Will Kempe and that when he left the Globe Theater his place was taken by Arnim. Now, we can see that the Dromios, the Gobbos, Launce and Speed are merely "clowns" as the Elizabethans called the funny men,—“Let not your clowns speak more than is set down for them.” The Dromios and the Gobbos and the corresponding parts in Shakspeare’s earlier plays, including Peter in ‘Romeo and Juliet,’ are only funny men, with little individuality, almost characterless; and we may surmise that this was due to Shakspeare’s own inexperience in the delineation of humorous character. But we may, if we choose, credit it also to the fact that Kempe was only a funny man, and not a character-actor. And we can find support for this in the superior richness and stricter veracity of the low comedy characters composed by Shakspeare after Arnim took Kempe’s place,—Dogberry, the porter in ‘Macbeth,’ the gravedigger in ‘Hamlet,’ comic parts which are also characters, equipt with more or less philosophy. And again this may be ascribed either to Shakspeare’s own ripening as a humorist or to the richer capacity of Arnim. But why may not these two causes have coöperated?

Then there is the brilliant series of parts composed for a dashing young comedian,—Mercutio,

Gratiano, Cassio, Laertes. That these successive characters were all entrusted to the same performer seems to me beyond question; and it seems to me equally indisputable that Shakspeare knew what he was doing when he composed these characters. He was assured in advance that they would be well played; and there is no reason to doubt that in composing them he profited by his intimate knowledge of the histrionic endowment of the unidentified member of the company for whom they were written, giving him nothing to do which he was not capable of doing well, and giving him again and again the kind of thing that he had already exhibited the ability to do well.

Another group of parts is equally obviously intended for an actor who had shown himself to be an expert in the impersonation of comic old women, boldly characterized, broadly painted, highly colored in humor,—Mrs. Quickly (who appears in four plays), the nurse in ‘Romeo and Juliet’ and Mrs. Overdone in ‘Measure for Measure.’ Here again I venture the guess that this low comedian may have earlier been cast for the Dromio and the Gobbo which was not given to Kempe. And I wish to record my regret that we cannot pick out from the list of the company at the Globe the name of the “creator” of Mrs. Quickly and her sisters, any more than we can

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identify the "creator" of Mercutio and his brothers.

In my biographies of Shakspeare and of Molière I have dwelt in ampler detail with this dependence of the two greatest dramatists of the modern world upon the actors who were their comrades in art and their friends in life; and I have here adduced only a part of the testimony which goes to show that both the English dramatist and the French were visited by the same muse,—whether of the "sorry sort" or not must be left for each of us to decide for himself.

IV

"It is not more difficult to write a good play," so the Spanish dramatist Benavente has declared, "than it is to write a good sonnet; only one must know how to write it—just as one must know how to write a sonnet. This is the principal resemblance between the drama and the other forms of literature."

The writing of a sonnet imposes rigorous restrictions on a poet; he must utter his thought completely in fourteen lines, no more and no less, and these lines must conform to a prescribed sequence of rimes. But the masters of the sonnet have proved that this enforced compression and this arbitrary arrangement may be a help rather

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than a hindrance,—not a stumbling block, but a stepping stone to higher achievement. May not the limitations under which Shakspeare had to work, may not the necessity of cutting his cloth to fit his comrades, may not these enforced conditions have also been helpful and not harmful? And if this is possible (and even probable) what warrant have we for thinking scorn of the great dramatist because he was a good workman, making the best of the only tools he had? In disposing important characters to the acting of Burbage, Shakspeare was probably no more conscious of being cribbed, cabined, and confined than was Milton when he shut himself up in the narrow cell of the sonnet.

The artist must be free to express himself, but he attains the loftiest freedom when he accepts the principle of liberty within the law. Many of the masterpieces of the several arts have been produced under restrictions as sharply defined as those of the sonnet, and have been all the finer because of these restrictions. The architect, for one, does not choose what he shall build, he has perforce to design an edifice for a special purpose on a special area. The mural painter has a given wall-space assigned to him, where his work is to be seen under special conditions of light; and often his subject is also prescribed for him. The sculptor is sometimes subordinate to the archi-

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tect, who decides upon the size and the subject of the group of statuary needed to enhance the beauty of the building. The artist who modelled the figures in the frieze of the Parthenon had little freedom and yet he wrought a mighty masterpiece. Michael Angelo's David is what it is because the sculptor was asked to utilize a block of marble of unusual size and shape; and his Last Judgment is what it is because he accepted the commission to decorate the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In fact, Michael Angelo's muse was "of that sorry sort which produces made-to-order garments to fit the tastes and idiosyncrasies of a single" patron.

If Shakspeare fitted his characters to the actors who were to play them, he was doing what Molière was to do; and this companionship is honorable. He was doing what the sculptor of the Parthenon did and the painter of the Sistine, no more and no less; and he stands in no need of apology.

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VII

STRANGE SHAKSPERIAN
PERFORMANCES

VII

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I

IF Shakspeare could return to earth he would find many things to astonish him, not the least of which would be his own world-wide reputation. He seems to have been, so far as we can judge from his works and from the sparse records that remain, a modest man, with no sense of his own importance and with no pretension of superiority over his fellow-poets. In his lifetime there was scant appreciation for his plays, since the drama was then held to be little better than journalism, scarcely worthy to be criticized as literature. That he was popular, or in other words that his plays pleased the people, and that he was liked personally by his associates,—this seems to be clearly established. But there was no recognition of his supremacy as a poet, as a creator of character or even as a playwright. As Shakspeare was a singularly healthy person, we can confidently assume that he did not look upon himself as an unappreciated genius.

Therefore, if he came back to us we cannot

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doubt that he would stand aghast before the constantly increasing library of books that have been written about him in the past two centuries. Nor can we doubt that this would appeal to his sense of humor. He would probably be interested to look into a few of the commentaries which seek to elucidate him; but he would not long pursue this perusal; and he would shut the books with a laugh or at least with a smile at the obstinate perversity of the critics who have wearied themselves (and not infrequently their readers also) in the vain attempt to explain what originally needed no explanation, since it had been plain enough to the unlettered crowds which flocked into the Globe Theater and stood entranced while his stories enrolled themselves on the stage.

If he were permitted to wander from the library where the immense mass of Shaksperiana fills shelf after shelf, and to enter any of our comfortable playhouses to witness a performance of one of his own plays, as set on the stage by an enterprising and artistic producer, such as Sir Henry Irving, he would again be astonished. The theater itself would be strange to him, for it would be roofed and lighted, whereas the playhouse he knew was open to the sky and dependent on the uncertain sun for its illumination. The stage would be equally novel, for it would

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have sumptuous scenery, whereas the platform of his day had had no scenery and only a few properties, a throne or a pulpit, a bed or a well-head. The actors would be unlike his fellow-players at the Globe since they would be attired with a strenuous effort for historical accuracy, whereas Burbage and Kempe, Condell and Hemming were accustomed to costume themselves in the elaborate and sumptuous garb of the Elizabethan gallants, glad when they could don the discarded attire of a wealthy courtier. And perhaps what would surprize him as much as anything would be to behold his very feminine heroines impersonated by women instead of being undertaken by shaven lads, as was the habit in his day.

As he was an artist in construction, an expert in stage-craft as this had been conditioned by the circumstances of the Tudor playhouse, he could not very well fail to be annoyed by the curtailing of his plays to adjust themselves to the circumstances of our superbly equipt theaters; and he would resent the chopping and the changing, the modification and the mangling to which his plays are subjected so that their swift succession of situations could each of them be localized by appropriate and complicated scenery. But because he was a modest man and because he had composed his tragedies and his

comedies to please his audiences, he would probably soon be reconciled to all these transmogrifications when he saw that his pieces had none the less retained their power to attract spectators and to delight their ears and their eyes. If the house was crowded night after night, then he would feel that he had no call to protest, since other times bring other manners.

II

IF Shakspeare would be surprized to see Ophelia performed by a girl, he would be still more surprized, not to say shocked, to see Hamlet performed by a woman. And yet this is a spectacle that he might have beheld again and again in the nineteenth century, if he had been permitted to visit the theaters of New York at irregular intervals. In that hundred years he could have seen not one female Hamlet or two or three but at least a score of them. The complete list is given in Laurence Hutton's 'Curiosities of the American Stage'; it begins with Mrs. Bartley; it includes Clara Fisher, Charlotte Cushman and Anne Dickinson; and it was drawn up too early to include Sarah Bernhardt, whose unfortunate experiment belongs to the very last year of the last century.

George Henry Lewes asserted that 'Hamlet'

itself is so broad in its appeal, so interesting in its story, so moving in its episodes, that no actor had ever made a total failure in the part. It might be asserted with equal truth that no actress had ever succeeded in it, because Hamlet is essentially masculine and therefore impossible to a woman, however lofty her ambition or however abundant her histrionic faculty. It is not a disparagement of the versatility and dexterity of Sarah Bernhardt to record that the details of her impersonation of the melancholy Prince have wholly faded from the memory of one spectator who yet retains an unforgettable impression of Coquelin's beautifully humorous embodiment of the First Gravedigger.

It was perhaps because Charlotte Cushman was more or less lacking in womanly charm and because she was possessed of more or less masculine characteristics, that her Hamlet seems to have been more successful, or, at least, less unsuccessful than that of any other woman. Nor was Hamlet the only one of Shakspeare's male characters that she undertook in the course of her long and honorable career in the United States and in Great Britain. Altho she was an incomparable Katherine in 'Henry VIII,' dowering the discarded Queen with poignant pathos, she undertook more than once the part of Cardinal Wolsey, which does not present itself as the

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kind of a character likely to be attractive to a woman. From all the accounts that have come down to us, she appears to have impersonated Romeo more satisfactorily than either Wolsey or Hamlet. In fact, one competent critic, who had seen her in all her greatest parts, including Lady Macbeth and Meg Merrilies, selected as her highest peak of achievement the moment when Romeo inflamed by the death of Mercutio provokes Tybalt in a fiery outburst:

Now, Tybalt, take the villain back,
That late thou gav'st me!

Shakspeare would not in all probability be long displeased to see Ophelia and Queen Katherine and Juliet impersonated by women, however much he might be annoyed by the vain efforts of any woman to assume the masculinity of Hamlet and Wolsey and Romeo. His tragedies are of imagination all compact, and he might very well wish to have them treated with all possible respect. But perhaps he would not insist on taking his comedies quite so seriously; and therefore he might have been amused rather than aggrieved if he could have seen the performance of 'As You Like It' given by the Professional Woman's League at Palmer's Theater in November, 1893, when every part in the piece was entrusted to a woman.

III

HERE was a complete turning of the tables, a triumphant assertion of woman's right to do all that becomes a man. When the comedy had been originally produced at the Globe Theater in London (probably in 1600 but possibly a year or two earlier) no actresses had ever been seen on the English stage; and therefore Rosalind and Celia and Audrey had to be entrusted to three shaven lads whom the older actors had taken as apprentices. When the comedy was performed at Palmer's Theater in New York in 1893, almost three centuries later, Orlando and Adam, Touchstone and Jaques were undertaken by actresses of a maturer age and of a richer experience than the Elizabethan boys could ever have acquired.

As one of those who had the pleasure of beholding this unprecedented performance I am glad to bear testimony that I really enjoyed my afternoon and that 'As You Like It' lost little of its charm when men were banished from its cast. Jaques was undertaken by Janauschek, aging and enfeebled, yet still vigorous of mind and still in command of all her artistic resources. The Orlando was Maude Banks, a brave figure in her attempt at masculine attire. The Touchstone was Kate Davis; and Charles, the Duke's wrestler, was Marion Abbott.

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There is a delightful unreality about 'As You Like It,' an element of "make-believe," an aroma of Once upon a Time, a flavor of "old familiar far-off things"; and it was this quality which was plainly prominent in the performance by the Professional Woman's League. Consider for a moment the fascinating complexity of Rosalind's conduct when she was impersonated by a shaven lad. The Elizabethan spectators beheld a boy playing the part of a girl, who disguises herself as a boy and who then asks her lover to pretend that she is a girl. Set down in black and white this intricacy may appear a little puzzling; but seen on the stage it causes no confusion nowadays and it is transparently piquant. Yet there was far more verisimilitude in the performance in the Tudor playhouse than there can be in our modern theaters, because it was easy enough for the youth who was playing Rosalind to look like a lad, after he had once donned doublet and hose, because he *was* a lad and not a lass; whereas the woman who now impersonates Rosalind finds it difficult (if not impossible) to make her male disguise impenetrable.

The fact is, however, that our latterday leading lady is not inclined to take seriously Rosalind's attempt to pass herself off as a man. She is likely to be a little too well satisfied with her feminine charms to be insistently anxious to

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conceal them; she does not want the audience ever to forget that she is a woman to be wooed, even if she is willing to pretend that she is a youth. 'As You Like It' is my favorite among all Shakspeare's plays and in the course of more than half-a-century of playgoing I must have seen almost a score of Rosalinds; but I cannot now recall a single one who made an honest effort to deceive Orlando, as Shakspeare meant him to be deceived, if the story is to be accepted. As a result of this persistent femininity of Rosalind when she is masquerading as Ganymede, most of the Orlandos whom I can call up one after another let themselves flirt with Ganymede as if they had penetrated Rosalind's disguise. It was a striking merit of John Drew's Orlando that he always treated Ganymede as the lad Rosalind was pretending to be, making it clear to the audience that no doubt as to Ganymede's sex had ever crossed his mind.

IV

I AM inclined to guess that if the author of 'As You Like It' had accepted an invitation from the Professional Woman's League, he would have sat out the performance at Palmer's Theater, gazing at it with tolerant eye and courteously

complimenting the Lady President or the Lady Vice-President who had been deputed to escort him to his box. But I make no doubt that his glance would have been less favorable had he been a spectator of a performance of 'Romeo and Juliet' given in May, 1877, at Booth's Theater for the benefit of George Rignold, who appeared as Romeo supported by seven different Juliets, the part changing impersonators with every reappearance of the character. Grace d'Urffy danced in the masquerade, Adelaide Neilson leaned down from the balcony, Ada Dyas was married in the cell of Friar Lawrence, Maude Granger shrank from bloodshed, Marie Wainwright parted from Romeo, Fanny Davenport drank the potion, and Minnie Cummings awakened in the tomb.

It cannot be denied that Romeo was the greatest lover in all literature; but he was not a Don Juan deserting one mistress after another, and still less was he a Bluebeard married to half-a-dozen wives. The diversity of actresses, one replacing another as the sad tale rolled forward to its foredoomed end, may have served to attract a larger audience than Rignold could allure by his unaided ability; but it was destructive of the integrity of the tragedy. The unavoidable result of this freakish experiment was to take the mind of the audience off from the play itself and

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to focus it on a succession of histrionic stunts, —the single scenes in which the Juliets, one after another, exhibited themselves in rivalry with one another. The continuity of the tragedy of young love in the springtime of life was basely broken, its poetry was sadly defiled, and its dignity was indisputably desecrated. The actresses who lent themselves to this catchpenny show were ill-advised; they were false to their art; and they took no profit from their sacrifice of their standing in the profession. While the performance was discreditable to all who were concerned in it, the major part of the disgrace must be assumed by the actor who lowered himself to make money by it.

The obvious objections which must be urged against the splitting up of a single part among half-a-dozen performers do not lie against the appearance of a single actor in two or more characters. In fact, the doubling of parts, as it is called, is one of the oldest of theatrical expedients; and it was the custom in the ceremonial performances of the Greek drama at Athens, when there were only three actors, who might have to impersonate in turn seven or eight characters. It sprang up again in Tudor times, when a strolling company like that to which Hamlet addressed his advice numbered only a scant half-dozen members, and in which there

might be only one boy to bear the burden of two or three or even four female characters.

When several actresses come forward in swift succession to speak the lovely lines of Juliet our interest is interrupted by every change; and the attention we are forced to pay to the appearance and the personality of each of the successive performers is necessarily subtracted from that which we ought to be giving to the character these actresses are pretending to impersonate. But when an actress appears in the beginning of the play as a mother, to reappear at the end of the piece as a daughter, there is only a single adjustment of our attention to be made; and this is easily achieved. In some cases, or at least with some spectators, there would be no need of any adjustment, since these spectators might not become aware that the same performer had been entrusted with the part of the daughter as well as that of the mother.

When she revived 'A Winter's Tale,' Mary Anderson so arranged the play that she could appear as Hermione in the earlier acts and as Perdita in the later acts, resuming the character of the mother only at the very end when the supposed statue of Hermione starts to life and descends from the pedestal. Of course, there had to be a few excisions from the text of the fifth act so that the actress could be seen first as the

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lovely maiden and second as the stately matron, beautiful mother of a more beautiful daughter. The lines cut out were only a slight loss to the play, whereas the doubling up which these omissions made possible was a great gain for the spectators. I feel assured that if Shakspeare could have been one of these spectators he would have been as delighted and as fascinated as I was. He would have pardoned without a word of protest the violence done to the construction of his story.

Nor am I any the less convinced that if Shakspeare had been present at one of the memorable representations of his greatest tragedy when Salvini was Othello and Edwin Booth Iago, he would have smiled reproachfully at those who were harsh in denouncing the performance as a profanation of his play on the pretext that Salvini spoke Italian while Booth and the rest of the cast spoke English. It would so greatly gratify a playwright to have two of his superbest parts sustained by the two foremost tragedians of the time that he would be willing enough to overlook the apparent incongruity of their using two different tongues. Perhaps the author might have been inspired to point out to the cavillers that Salvini's retention of his mother tongue resulted in restoring to Othello the language which the Moor of Venice would actually have spoken.

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It is, of course, a flagrant falsification of the fact for Othello and Iago, Hamlet and Ophelia, Brutus and Cassius to speak English instead of Italian or Danish or Latin. But this is necessary if an English-speaking audience is to enjoy 'Othello' and 'Hamlet' and 'Julius Cæsar'; and as it is necessary, the spectators are rarely conscious that it is, strictly speaking, "unnatural."

The bilingual performance of 'Othello' in which Salvini and Booth nobly supported one another was not the first of those in which Booth had been engaged. When Emil Devrient came on a professional visit to the United States in the early sixties of the last century, Booth was producing a succession of Shaksperian tragedies at the Winter Garden theater; and he courteously invited the German actor to play Othello to his Iago. At these performances Devrient spoke German, Booth spoke English, and so did the rest of the supporting company, excepting only the Emilia, a part cast to Madam Methuaschiller, a German actress who had migrated to America and learnt to speak English with only a slight trace of foreign accent. As she had not lost the use of her mother-tongue, she was allowed to alternate English and German, employing the former always, except in conversing with Devrient, when she dropt into the latter. Perhaps her chopping and changing from English to

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German and back again to English may have been somewhat disconcerting and distracting to the audience, who would more readily adjust themselves to Devrient's constant use of his own tongue.

And the moral of all this is? Well, you can find it very pleasantly expressed in a quotation from a letter which was written by the foremost of American Shaksperian scholars to Edith Wynne Matthison and which is preserved in the introduction to Theodora Ursula Irvine's excellent 'How to pronounce the Names in Shakspeare.' Apparently Mrs. Kennedy had consulted Dr. Furness as to the pronunciation of a heroine's name:

Continue to call her Rösälind, altho I am much afraid that Shakspeare pronounced it Rōsalind. Of all men I would take liberties with Shakspeare sooner than anyone else. Was he so small-minded that he would care about trifles? Take my word for it, he would smile with exquisite benignity and say, "Pronounce the name, my child, exactly as you think it sounds the sweetest."

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VIII

THACKERAY AND THE THEATER

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I

IN the never-ending comparisons and contrasts between Thackeray and Dickens, which show no sign of abating even now, when the younger of the two has been dead for half-a-century, one striking difference between them has often been dwelt upon—Dickens was incessantly theatrical, in his dress, in his novels, in his readings, whereas Thackeray shrank from all theatricality, in his own apparel, in his fiction and in his lecturing. Dickens delighted in reading the most dramatic passages from his novels, actually impersonating the characters, and adjusting the lighting of his reading-desk so as to enable his hearers to see his swiftly changing expression. Thackeray's lectures were narratives enhanced in interest by anecdote and by criticism; he read them simply, seeking no surcharged effects; and he disliked his task. As he wrote to an American friend, "I shall go on my way like an old mountebank; I get more and more ashamed of my nostrums daily."

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The author of 'Vanity Fair' might in his preface feign that he was only a showman in a booth, and he might talk of "putting the puppets away"; but as Austin Dobson phrased it aptly in his centenary tribute:

These are no puppets, smartly dressed,
But jerked by strings too manifest;
No dummies wearing surface skin
Without organic frame within;
Nor do they deal in words and looks
Found only in the story-books.
No! For these beings use their brains,
Have pulse and vigor in their veins;
They move, they act; they take and give
E'en as the master wills; they *live*—
Live to the limit of their scope,
Their anger, pleasure, terror, hope.

His stories are never puppet-plays and they never have the concentrated color which the theater demands. Nor was this because he was not a constant playgoer, enjoying the drama in all its manifestations. Altho he had no close intimacy with actor-folk, such as Dickens had with Macready and later with Fechter, he was for years meeting at the weekly *Punch* dinners, Douglas Jerrold, Mark Lemon and Tom Taylor, all of them playwrights by profession.

Nor were his novels influenced in any marked degree by the dramatists, since it was not the plays of Cervantes and Fielding and Balzac that

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attracted him but their richer and more varied works of fiction. On the other hand, the novels of Dickens reveal the impress made upon him by the melodramas and by the farces which had a fleeting vogue in his early manhood; he relished the boldly melodramatic and he revelled in the broadly farcical. More especially was Dickens under the domination of Ben Jonson, whose plays were still occasionally seen on the stage when Dickens was young and impressionable. It might almost be said that Dickens transferred the method of the comedy-of-humors from the play to the novel; and it is significant that when he made his first appearance as an amateur actor it was to assume the superbly caricatural character of Captain Bobadil. It is perhaps because of Dickens' theatricality that he exerted a deep and wide influence upon the British playwrights from 1840 to 1870, whereas it was not until Robertson began in 1865 to deal more simply with life than the immediately preceding playwrights of Great Britain, that any of the English writers of comedy allowed himself to profit by Thackeray's less highly colored portrayals of men and manners.

Yet Thackeray's enjoyment of the theater was not less than Dickens'. His biographer, Lewis Melville, has recorded that Thackeray once asked a friend if he loved the play, and when he received the qualified answer, "Ye-es, I like a

good play," he retorted, "Oh, get out! You don't even understand what I mean!" Almost his first published effort as a draftsman was a series of sketches of a ballet, "Flore et Zephyr"; and toward the end of his life, in 1858, he presided at the annual dinner of the Royal General Theatrical Fund.

In his days of arduous hack-work he wrote half-a-dozen papers on the French stage. One of these essays was entitled 'Dickens in France'; and in this he described with abundant gusto the gross absurdities of a Parisian perversion of 'Nicholas Nickleby,' produced at the Ambigu. Another is called 'English History and Character on the French Stage'; and in this he has an easy task to show up the wilful disregard of veracity which taints the ingenious 'Verre d'Eau' of Scribe. A third paper is devoted to 'French Dramas and Melodramas'; and in this he begins by an unfortunate prediction, that French tragedy, the classic plays of Corneille and Racine, "in which half-a-dozen characters appear and spout sonorous alexandrines" was dead or dying, and that Rachel was trying in vain to revive tragedy and

to untomb Racine; but do not be alarmed, Racine will never come to life again, and cause audiences to weep as of yore. Madam Rachel can only galvanize the corpse, not revivify it. Ancient French tragedy, red-

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heeled, patched and be-periwigged, lies in its grave; and it is only the ghost of it that we see, which the fair Jewess has raised.

Here Thackeray revealed his insularity, his inability to "penetrate French literature by an interior line." Red-heeled, patched and be-periwigged as French tragedy may be, and as it undoubtedly is in some of its aspects, it is not dead even now, more than three quarters of a century since Thackeray preached this funeral sermon, nor is it dying. After the fiery fervor of the Romanticist revolt it may have needed the genius of Rachel to bring it back to favor; but to-day it is kept alive by the more modest talent of her successors.

II

BEFORE he was of age Dickens had thought seriously of becoming an actor; and he even went so far as to apply to a manager for an engagement. Not long after he wrote a farce or two; and he was responsible for the book of a little ballad-opera. Late in his career he collaborated with Wilkie Collins in writing 'No Thoroughfare,' an effective melodrama, compounded specifically for Charles Fechter, who acted it successfully, first in London in English and then in Paris in French (under the title of 'L'Abîme').

In Dickens' letters we are told of the trouble he took in getting all the details of stage-management arranged to his satisfaction. It is evident that he found these labors congenial and that he did not doubt his possession of the intuitive qualities of the play-producer, so distinct from those of the artist in pure narrative.

Thackeray also made one or two juvenile attempts at the dramatic form. Perhaps it is safer to say that these early efforts were dramatic only in form, in their being wholly in dialog; and there is little reason to suppose that he endeavored to have them acted. In 1840, the year in which the 'Paris Sketch Book' was published, there was produced in Paris a melodrama, called the 'Abbaye de Penmarque' and founded upon Southey's 'Mary, the Maid of the Inn.' Its authors were announced as MM. Tournemine and Thackeray; and an American translator fearlessly ascribed it to the author of the 'Paris Sketch Book,' finding possible justification in the catalog of the British Museum and in the early edition of Shepard's bibliography. The ascription was erroneous; and the "nautical melodrama" (as the translator termed it) seems to have been written by a distant kinsman of the novelist otherwise unknown to fame. The explanation recalls that given by an Irish critic, who solved his doubts as to another case of dis-

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puted authorship by the opinion that "Shakspeare's plays were not written by Shakspeare himself, but by another man of the same name."

Once and once only did Thackeray make a serious effort to appear before the public as a playwright. In 1854 after he had established his fame by 'Vanity Fair' and consolidated it by 'Pendennis' and the 'Newcomes,' he composed a comedy in two acts, the 'Wolves and the Lamb.' He proffered the play to two managers in turn, first to Buckstone of the Haymarket Theater, and then to Alfred Wigan of the Olympic. They declined it, one after the other; and apparently Thackeray made no further effort to have it produced. In 1860 he utilized the plot of his play in a story, 'Lovel the Widower,' which was never one of his attractive novels, perhaps because it was more or less deprived of spontaneity by its enforced reliance upon a plot put together for another purpose.

When he moved into his own home in Kensington in 1862, only a few months before his untimely death, he arranged an amateur performance of the 'Wolves and the Lamb' as a special attraction for his house-warming. He did not undertake any part in his own play; but he appeared in the character of Bonnington just before the final fall of the curtain, and spoke a

rhymed epilog, by way of salutation to his guests:

Our drama ends;
Our Landlord gives a greeting to his friends;
Some rich, some poor, some doubtful, some sincere,
Some tried and loved for many a faithful year.
He looks around and bids all welcome here.
And as we players unanimously say
A little speech should end a little play;
Through me he tells the friendliest of pits
He built this story with his little wits;
These built the house from garret down to hall;
These paid the bills,—at least, paid nearly all.

And though it seems quite large enough already,
I here declare the Landlord's purpose steady
Before the novel-writing days are o'er
To raise in this very house one or two stories more.

As we recall the pitiful penury of the English drama in the midyears of the nineteenth century, when the stage relied largely upon misleading adaptations of French plays, we may wonder why Buckstone and Wigan were inhospitable to the 'Wolves and the Lamb.' It is true that Thackeray's little piece was slight in story, devoid of novel situation, obvious in its humor, simple in its character-delineation, and traditional in its methods. But at that time both Buckstone and Wigan were willing enough to risk their money on other plays by authors of less authority, plays which were quite as super-

ficial and quite as artificial as this. Perhaps the two managers were moved to decline it partly because they were disappointed in that it had none of the captivating characteristics of Thackeray's major fictions. So few of these qualities did the play possess that if it had been published anonymously it might have been attributed to some unknown imitator of Thackeray rather than to Thackeray himself. It revealed more of his mannerisms than of his merits.

Obviously he did not take his little comedy very seriously; he did not put his back into his work; he was content to write no better than his contemporary competitors in comedy and without their experience and their knack. It is difficult to deny that in the 'Wolves and the Lamb' most of the characters are only puppets; and that therefore Thackeray was for once well advised to put them away. The real hero of the play, it may be amusing to remark, is John, the butler, who has a soul above his station, and who is a sketchy anticipation of Barrie's Admirable Crichton.

Setting aside his single venture into play-making and attempting to estimate Thackeray's potentiality as a playwright, we cannot help feeling that he lacked the swift concision, the immitigable compression, imposed on the dramatist by the limitation of the traffic of the stage to two

hours. Also he rarely reveals his possession of the architectonic quality, the logical and inevitable structure, which is requisite in the compacting of a plot and in the co-ordination of effective incidents. Not often in his novels does he rise to the handling of the great passionate crises of existence, which, so Stevenson has told us, are the stuff out of which the serious drama is made. He is so little theatrical that he is only infrequently dramatic, in the ordinary sense of the word. He prefers the sympathetic portrayal of our common humanity in its moments of leisurely self-revelation.

Finally, if Thackeray had made himself a dramatist, by dint of determination, he would have lost as an artist more than he gained since he would have had perforce to forego the interpretive comment in which his narrative is perpetually bathed. In his unfolding of plot and his presentation of character, Thackeray could act as his own chorus, his own expositor, his own *raisonneur* (to borrow the French term for the character introduced into a play not for its own sake but to serve as the mouthpiece of its author). "Thackeray," so W. C. Brownell has asserted in his sympathetic study,

enwraps and embroiders his story with his personal philosophy, charges it with his personal feeling, draws out with inexhaustible personal zest its typical sug-

gestiveness, and deals with his material directly instead of dispassionately and disinterestedly.

This is a privilege implacably denied to the playwright, even if he has abundant compensation in other ways. As Brownell also reminded us, the novel is

a picture of life, but a picture that not only portrays but shows the significance of its subject; its form is particularly, uniquely elastic, and it possesses epic advantages which it would fruitlessly forego in conforming itself to purely dramatic canons.

III

DICKENS'S novels were both theatrical and dramatic; they were influenced by the melodramas and farces of his youth, as has already been noted; and it was natural that they should tempt adapters to dramatize them. They abounded in robustly drawn character, often verging into caricature; and therefore they appealed to the actor. They had episodes of violence certain to prove attractive to the public which liked to be powerfully moved and which had little delicacy as to the passions portrayed. Dickens's sprawling serials were too straggling in story ever to make it possible to compress them into a solidly built framework of plot; but it was not difficult to disentangle a succession of

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situations sufficient to make an effective panorama of action, peopled with familiar figures. And of these there have been an unnumbered host.

If Thackeray's novels lend themselves less temptingly to the paste-and-scissors method of the dramatizer, they had an immediate vogue and an enduring reputation, which have allured a host of playwrights, most of whom have confined their exertion to the singling out of a salient character and to the presentation in a play of the more important situations in which this personality is involved, utilizing the other figures and the other episodes only in so far as these might be necessary to set off the chosen hero or heroine. Naturally enough it is upon 'Vanity Fair' that they have laid hands most frequently. The final monthly part of the original publication had scarcely been issued when John Brougham ventured upon a stage-version of it, which he produced at Burton's theater in New York in 1849.

This was an attempt to dramatize the novel as a whole, although necessarily Becky Sharp held the center of the stage. There was a revival of Brougham's adaptation a few years later; there was another attempt by George Fawcett Rowe; and then in 1893 Sir James Barrie made a one-act playlet out of the last glimpse

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of Becky that Thackeray affords us, when she and Jos. Sedley, Amelia and Dobbin find themselves together in the little German watering-place and when Amelia learns the truth about her dead husband's advances to Becky. Sir James has kindly informed me that he thinks that every word spoken in his little piece was Thackeray's, "but some of them were probably taken from different chapters."

A few years later two other Becky Sharp pieces were produced, one on either side of the Atlantic. The American play was adroitly prepared by Langdon Mitchell; it was called 'Becky Sharp'; it was produced in 1899 and it has been revived at least once since; Mrs. Fiske was the Becky. The British play was by Robert Hichens and Cosmo Gordon Lennox; it was originally performed in London, with Marie Tempest as Becky; and she came over to the United States to present it a few times at the New Theater in New York in 1910.

A similar method—the method of focussing the attention of the audience on a single dominating personality and of excluding all the episodes in which this personality was not supreme—was followed in more recent plays cut out of the 'Newcomes' and 'Pendennis.' No doubt this was the only possible way of dramatizing novels of such complexity of episode. Brownell

has declared that the range of the 'Newcomes' is extraordinary for the thread of a single story to follow:

Yet all its parts are as interdependent as they are numerous and varied. It is Thackeray's largest canvas, and it is filled with the greatest ease and to the borders. . . . It illustrates manners with an unexampled crowd of characters, the handling of which, without repetition or confusion, without digression or discord, exhibits the control of the artist equally with the imaginative and creative faculty of the poet.

A story as vast as the 'Newcomes' simply defies the dramatizer; and all he can do is to build his play about a single group or, better still, around a single character, relentlessly excluding all the other allied groups of personages not less interesting in themselves. This has been the method, if may be recorded, chosen by the several French playwrights who have been moved to make dramas out of one or another of the almost equally complex novels of Balzac.

So it was that Michael Morton made a 'Colonel Newcome' piece for Beerbohm Tree in 1906 and that Langdon Mitchell made a 'Major Pendennis' piece for John Drew in 1916. So it was that Francis Burnand made a 'Jeames' piece for Edward Terry in 1878 out of the 'Diary of C. Jeames de la Pluche.' Altho Edward Terry was an amusing Jeames and altho

Nelly Farren was an amusing Mary Ann Hoggin, the "New and Original Comedy" (as its adapter styled it) did not strike me as amusing in itself; it was three quarters Burnand and barely one quarter Thackeray—and the blending was not to my taste. As I sat through the performance patiently I came to understand the provocation which had led a gallery boy to shout down to Burnand as he took the author's curtain call on the first night,—“I say, Frank, it's a good thing Thackeray is dead, isn't it?”

As the author had provided the 'History of Henry Esmond' with a unifying figure, the dramatizers have only too abundant material for a chronicle-play showing him at different periods in his long and honorable career. To make a compact play, a true drama, out of the protracted story, would be plainly impossible, yet it might not be so difficult to select salient episodes which would serve as a succinct summary of the story. But altho the attempt has been made several times—once for Henry Irving—no one of the versions has ever been put up for a run in any of the principal playhouses of either New York or London. In any dramatization one scene would impose itself, the scene in which Esmond breaks his sword before the prince whom he has loyally served, the scene in which Thackeray is most truly dramatic in the noblest sense of the

word. If this had been put on the stage it would have been only a rendering unto the theater of a thing that belonged to the theater, since perhaps Thackeray had it suggested to him by the corresponding scene in the opera of 'The Favorite'—altho the suggestion may also have come from the 'Vicomte de Bragelonne' or from the later play which Dumas made out of his own story.

There remains to be mentioned only one other dramatization, that of the 'Rose and the Ring,' made by H. Savile Clark in 1890. From all accounts the performance of this little play, with its music by Walter Slaughter, provided a charming spectacle for children, one to which we may be sure that Thackeray would have had no objection and which indeed might have delighted his heart.

IV

It is testimony to Thackeray's own liking for the theater that he is continually telling us that this or that character went to the play. He also informs us that Henry Esmond was the author of the 'Faithful Fool,' a comedy performed by Her Majesty's Servants and published anonymously, attaining a sale of nine copies, whereupon Esmond had the whole impression de-

stroyed. And the first of the George Warringtons wrote two plays, 'Carpezan' and 'Pocahontas,' both of them tragedies, the first of which caught the public taste, whereas the second failed to prove attractive. We are all aware that Becky Sharp took part in the private theatricals at Gaunt House, making a most impressive Clytemnestra; but we are less likely to recall the hesitating suggestion that she may have been the Madame Rebecque who failed to please when she appeared in the 'Dame Blanche' at Strasburg in 1830. It was natural enough that Becky should go on the stage, since her mother had been a ballet-dancer.

Altho neither Thackeray nor Dickens ever attempted to write a novel of theatrical life, each of them gave us an inside view of a provincial stock-company in the earlier years of the nineteenth century. In 'Nicholas Nickleby' we are introduced to the actors and actresses under the management of Mr. Crummles; and in 'Pendennis' we have a less elaborate study of the actors and actresses under the management of Mr. Bingley. The group that Dickens portrays is more boldly drawn and more richly colored than the group that Thackeray sketches in with a few illuminating strokes. "What a light of benevolence it is that plays round Crummles and the Phenomenon and all those poor theatrical people

in that charming book," said Thackeray in his lecture on 'Charity and Humor.' "What a humor! And what a good humor!"

Altho in these episodes neither Dickens nor Thackeray aimed at the penetrating inquisition into the histrionic temperament that we find in Henry James's 'Tragic Muse' and in Howells's 'Story of a Play,' there is both validity and originality in Thackeray's portrait of Miss Fotheringay. In all the dozens and scores of theatrical novels that I have read, I do not recall any other attempt to show the actress who is only an instrument in the hands of a superior intelligence, a woman who has the divine gift and who can display it only when she is taught, perhaps by one himself deficient in the mimetic faculty but possessed of interpretative imagination. Possibly Thackeray bestows overmuch stupidity on the Fotheringay; but she was not too stupid to profit by the instruction of the devoted Bows. She had beauty, voice, manner, the command of emotion, without which the tragic actor is naught; and all she lacked was the intelligence which would enable her to make the most of her native endowment.

Except when she was on the stage Mrs. Sidons was an eminently uninspired woman; and not a little of her inspiration in the theater has been credited to the superior intellect of her

brother, John Philip Kemble. Rachel was intelligent, so intelligent that she was always eager to be aided by the intelligence of others. Legouv  recorded that if he gave her a suggestion, she seized on it and transmuted his copper into silver. She used to confess the immensity of her debt to Samson, a little dried up actor of "old men"; and she said once that she did not play a part half as well as she could play it, unless she had had the counsel of Samson. Even if she was a genius, she was rather a marvellous executant than a great composer; and there has been many another actress, even in our own time, who has owed a large part of her talent to the unsuspected guidance given by some one unknown to the public which pressed to applaud her.

Miss Fotheringay was not intelligent like Rachel and she was far duller than Mrs. Siddons, but she had in her the essential quality. She was teachable and Little Bows taught her.

He shrieked out in his cracked voice the parts, and his pupil learned them from him by rote. He indicated the attitudes, and set and moved those beautiful arms of hers. . . . With what indomitable patience and dulness she followed him. She knew that he made her; and she let herself be made. . . . She was not grateful, or ungrateful, or unkind, or ill-humored.

She might not be grateful, but she knew very well who had made her; she said so simply

enough, explaining why she had not earlier played the more important parts, "I didn't take the leading business then; I wasn't fit for it till Bows taught me."

So it was that Adrienne Lecouvreur, in the play which Scribe and Legouv   wrote for Rachel, thanked the little old prompter, Michonnet, who had taught her, "I was ungrateful in saying I had never had a teacher. There is a kind-hearted man, a sincere friend, whose counsels have always sustained me." And Legouv   has told us that at one of the rehearsals Rachel suddenly turned from Regnier, who was the Michonnet, and knelt before Samson, who was the Duc de Bouillon, and addressed this speech directly to him.

It would be interesting to know whether Thackeray ever saw 'Adrienne Lecouvreur,' which was produced in Paris in April, 1849, six months before 'Pendennis' began to appear in monthly parts.

(1920)

IX

MARK TWAIN AND THE THEATER

IX

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I

MARK TWAIN was a born story-teller; he was a born actor; he was not affrighted by the idea of facing an audience; he was fond of the theater; he lived in a time when the drama was regaining its proud position in our literature and when men of letters who had begun as novelists were turning dramatists. Why is it that he did not leave us even one play worthy to be set by the side of the 'Adventures of Huckleberry Finn'? Why is it that the only piece of his which was successful on the stage, is a poor thing, not wholly his own? Why is it that he did not persevere in playwriting as did his fellow humorists, George Bernard Shaw and George Ade, and his fellow story-tellers, Barrie and Tarkington?

These are questions which must have occurred to not a few of his admirers; and they are questions to which it is not easy to find an immediate answer. Yet there must be an explanation of some sort for this puzzling fact; and there may

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be profit in trying to discover it. Even if the answer shall prove to be incomplete and unsatisfactory, the inquiry is worth while for its own sake.

II

THAT Mark Twain was a born story-teller needs no argument; and that he was a born actor was equally evident not only to his few intimates but to all the many who heard him talk on his feet. If any witness must be called, the best would be Howells, his friend for forty years; and Howells's testimony is emphatic and decisive. He tells us Mark

held that an actor doubled the value of the author's words; and he was a great actor as well as a great author. He was a most consummate actor, with this difference from other actors, that he was the first to know the thoughts and invent the fancies to which his voice and action gave the color of life. Representation is the art of other actors; his art was creative as well as representative.

This quotation is from Howells's introduction to the collection of Mark's speeches; and I take another from 'My Mark Twain':

He was the most consummate public performer I ever saw, and it was an incomparable pleasure to hear him lecture; on the platform he was the great and finished actor he probably would not have been on the

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stage. . . . When he read his manuscript to you, it was with a thorough, however involuntary, recognition of its dramatic qualities. . . . He was realistic, but he was essentially histrionic; and rightly so. What we have strongly conceived we ought to make others strongly imagine, and we ought to use every art to that end.

As a born actor, he understood the necessity of preparation and rehearsal. He left nothing to chance. He knew how his effects ought to be made; and he knew how to make them. Even his seemingly spontaneous after-dinner speeches were thought out and worked out, in every minutest detail of inflection and hesitation. In his 'How to Tell a Story' he insisted that the total impression of his hair-raising ghost-story, the 'Golden Arm,' depended upon the exact calculation of a certain pause; and I can testify that on the only occasion I had the pleasure of hearing him tell the gruesome tale—one summer evening in 1890 at Onteora, in a cabin dimly lit by a flickering woodfire—the pause was long enough to be almost unbearable.

He stood in no fear of an audience, because he had an imperturbable self-confidence, rooted in a knowledge of his certain power of impressing all who came within sound of his voice. Moreover, he possessed to the end of his life the boyish delight in being conspicuous that he ascribed to Tom Sawyer. It is true that he was diffident

before he had proved himself as a lecturer; and in a little speech he made after a musical recital given by his daughter in 1906, he described his trepidation when he was about to make his first appearance before an audience:

I had stage-fright then for the first and last time. . . . After the first agonizing five minutes, my stage-fright left me, never to return. I know if I was going to be hanged I could get up and make a good showing—and I intend to.

When he was living in Hartford he often took part in private theatricals, the other performers being members of his own household. After a performance of a dramatization of the 'Prince and the Pauper' by the children of the Educational Alliance in 1907, he was called upon for a speech and he told the thousand little spectators that he had himself acted the part of Miles Hendon twenty-two years earlier. One of his daughters had been the Prince and the daughter of a neighbor was the Pauper. Mrs. Clemens was the dramatist and stage-manager. "Our coachman was the assistant stage-manager, second in command."

He had many friends among stage-folk, authors, actors and managers. He accepted the invitation to make the opening address at the Actors' Fund Fair in 1907. He lent William

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Gillette the money which enabled that veracious actor to start his career. He once gave a characteristically amusing account of his success in passing through the sternly defended stage-entrance to Daly's Theater. At a dinner to Henry Irving in London in June, 1900, he declared that

the greatest of all arts is to write a drama. It is a most difficult thing. It requires the highest talents possible and the rarest gifts. No, there is another talent that ranks with it—for anybody can write a drama—I have written about four hundred—but to get one accepted requires real ability. And I have never had that felicity yet.

He was a persistent playgoer, altho his visits to the theater were less frequent in later life than they had been earlier. He took the drama seriously, as he took the other facts of life; and he thought that the American theater was not doing its duty by the American people. In an illuminating article "About Play-Acting," published in a magazine in 1898 (and most unaccountably not included in any of the volumes of his complete works) he described a tragedy which he had seen at the Burg Theater in Vienna. Then he listed the shows on exhibition in New York in a single week; and he drew a moral from the contrast:

It is right and wholesome to have these light comedies and entertaining shows; and I shouldn't wish to

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see them diminished. But none of us is *always* in the comedy spirit; we have our graver moods; they come to us all; the lightest of us cannot escape them. These moods have their appetites,—healthy and legitimate appetites—and there ought to be some way of satisfying them. It seems to me that New York ought to have one theater devoted to tragedy. With her three millions of population, and seventy outside millions to draw upon, she can afford it, she can support it. America devotes more time, labor, money and attention to distributing literary and musical culture among the general public than does any other nation, perhaps; yet here you find her neglecting what is possibly the most effective of all the breeders and nurses and disseminators of high literary taste and lofty emotion—the tragic stage. To leave that powerful agency out is to haul the culture-wagon with a crippled team. Nowadays when a mood comes which only Shakspeare can set to music, what must we do? Read Shakspeare ourselves? Isn't it pitiful? It is playing an organ solo on a jews-harp. *We* can't read. None but the Booths can do it. . . .

Comedy keeps the heart sweet; but we all know that there is wholesome refreshment for both mind and heart in an occasional climb among the solemn pomps of the intellectual snow-summits built upon by Shakspeare. Do I seem to be preaching? It is out of my line; I only do it because the rest of the clergy seem to be on a vacation.

III

ALTHO I have quoted Mark's assertion that he had never had the felicity of having a play accepted, he did have two pieces produced by

managers; and a third, written in collaboration with Howells, had a brief and inglorious career at the expense of its authors. His first play, made out of one of his novels, drew delighted audiences for several seasons; the second, written in partnership with Bret Harte, and the third, written in partnership with Howells, met with so little success that they sank at once beneath the wave of oblivion, being almost unknown except in the hazy memories of the few surviving spectators who chanced to see one or the other during its brief stay on the stage. No one of the three has ever been published.

After Mark had settled in Hartford he formed a close friendship with his near neighbor Charles Dudley Warner; and in 1873 they joined forces in a novel, the 'Gilded Age.' They wrote it not so much in collaboration as in conjunction,—that is to say, each of the writers was responsible for the chapters he prepared himself; and there was no integrating co-ordination of their respective contributions. Mark was the author of more than half of the chapters; and he was the creator of the one outstanding character, Colonel Mulberry Sellers, an imaginative reproduction of a man he had known since boyhood, James Lamp-ton. Mark began by writing the first eleven chapters, then Warner wrote two, Mark followed with two more; and thus they worked alternately.

They labored, so Mark declared, "in the superstition that we were writing one coherent yarn, when I suppose, as a matter of fact, we were writing two incoherent yarns."

It was not long after the publication of their conjoint work that they were informed of the performance in San Francisco of a dramatization by one Gilbert S. Densmore, otherwise unknown to fame, the character of Colonel Sellers being impersonated by John T. Raymond. Action was at once taken to put a stop to this infringement on the copyright of the story. In the end a satisfactory arrangement was arrived at. Densmore was bought out; Warner, discovering that his share in the story had been but little drawn upon, relinquished any claim he might have; Mark made the piece over; and Raymond continued to play Colonel Sellers, under a contract which divided the profits between the author and the actor. For a season or two Mark's agent travelled with the company and reported on a postal card every night the author's share; and Howells has related how these welcome missives would come about dinnertime and how Mark would read them aloud in triumph. "One hundred and fifty dollars—two hundred dollars—three hundred dollars, were the gay figures which they bore and which he flaunted in the air before he sat down at table."

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It is difficult now to determine how much of the dramatic skeleton Densmore had put together to enable Colonel Sellers to exhibit the facets of his lovable character, survived in the play which drew crowded houses one long winter in New York. Here Mark himself is the best witness in his own behalf; and his biographer has quoted from an unpublished letter a clear-cut statement:

I entirely rewrote the play three separate and distinct times. I had expected to use little of [Densmore's] language and but little of his plot. I do not think that there are now twenty sentences of Mr. Densmore's in the play, but I used so much of his plot that I wrote and told him I should pay him about as much more as I had already paid him, in case the play proved a success.

Paine has printed Densmore's acknowledgment for this second payment, thanking Mark "for the very handsome manner in which you have acted in this matter."

During the run of the play in New York in the winter of 1874-5 I saw it twice, the second time on the hundredth performance, when Mark appeared before the curtain to tell the audience the tale of the man who tried to ride the Mexican plug and to explain that he was like this man after his fiery steed had thrown him, in that he was "speechless." I recall the play as a rickety

contrivance; it creaked in its joints; its plot was arbitrary and violent and unconvincing. Perhaps it was no worse than the earlier 'Solon Shingle' or the later 'Mighty Dollar'; but it was little, if any, better. Yet it served its purpose, which was to be a frame for the humorously veracious character of Colonel Sellers, the imperturbable visionary admirably acted by John T. Raymond. Mark himself liked Raymond's impersonation,—at least he did at first. Later he and Raymond fell out; and he put into his autobiography the assertion that Raymond was lacking in the ability to express the finer qualities of Sellers.

But playgoers could see in the part only what Raymond has expressed with the keenest appreciation of its histrionic possibilities; and they were satisfied, even if the author was not. To us Americans the character had a special appeal, because he represented at once our ingenious inventiveness and our incurable optimism. We had never met James Lampton, but we were all ready to accept Colonel Sellers as an old friend. Raymond told me once that in town after town he would be accosted by some man, who would say to him, "I saw you to-night—and I recognized myself. Didn't Mark ever tell you? Well, he took Sellers from *me*! Why, all my friends knew me the first time they saw you!"

The plot of the play was melodramatic on the verge of burlesque; it called for the wholly unnecessary explosion of a steamboat; it culminated in the trial of the injured heroine for the murder of the villain who had wronged her and insulted her. For the most part Colonel Sellers had little to do with the main story; and it was only when the sympathetic heroine was on trial for her life that Colonel Sellers was integrally related to the main action. I have revived my own fading memory of the bubbling humor of this final act by reading again what Howells wrote about it at the time:

But the greatest scenes are in the last act, where Colonel Sellers appears as a witness for the defence of Laura Hawkins. As he mounts the stand he affably recognizes and shakes hands with several acquaintances among the jury; he delivers his testimony in the form of a stump speech; he helplessly overrides all the protests, exceptions, and interruptions of the prosecution; from time to time he irresistibly turns and addresses the jury and can scarcely be silenced; while the attorneys are wrangling together he has seized a jurymen by the coat-lapel and is earnestly exhorting him in whisper. The effect is irresistibly ludicrous. It is farce and not farce, for, however extravagantly impossible the situation is, the man in it is deliciously true to himself. There is one bit of pathos, where Sellers tells how he knew Laura as a little girl, and implies that, though she might have killed a man, she could *not* have done *murder*.

The extravagantly impossible situation may have been taken over from the Densmore perversion; but the handling of it, the expressing out of it of all the humor it might be made to contain, that, we may be sure, was the doing of Mark himself. No one else could have done it.

Forty years ago and more I pointed out, in an article on the 'American on the Stage' that in so far as Colonel Sellers was a schemer, with an incessant activity in devising new methods for making money, he had been anticipated by a character in Ben Jonson's the 'Devil is an Ass'—added evidence of the kinship of the descendants of the Puritans with the daring Elizabethan adventurers. Where the American proposed a liniment for the sore eyes so multitudinous in the Orient and saw "millions in it!" the Elizabethan had advocated a device for making wine of raisins:

What hast thou there?
O, "Making wine of Raisins"; this is in hand now.
Yes, and as true a wine as the wines of France,
Or Spain or Italy: look of what grape
My raisin is, that wine I'll render perfect,
As of the Muscatel grape, I'll render Muscatel;
Of the Canary, his; the claret, his;
So of all kinds; and bate you of the prices
Of wine throughout the kingdom half in half.

When it is objected that this enterprise may

put up the price of raisins, the answer comes pat:

Why then I'll make it out of blackberries,
And it shall do the same. 'Tis but more art,
And the charge less.

There is a significant kinship between Ben Jonson and Mark Twain in the superb impossibility of their towering fantasies. But there is no true likeness between Meercraft, whose very name libels him as an unscrupulous exploiter of the eternal gullibility of mankind, and Colonel Sellers, who may have deceived others but who did so only because he had first deceived himself. Colonel Sellers was a man without guile; he was as sincere as he was frank; and he made no more profit out of his swift succession of vain imaginings than did those who were carried away by his magnificent self-confidence. The similarity between Ben Jonson's crook and Mark's enthusiast is only superficial; yet it may be worth noting that frenzied speculation was as characteristic of the golden age of England after the dispersal of the Armada as it was in the gilded age of America which was the aftermath of the Civil War. Moreover Ben Jonson and Mark Twain have this in common also, that they were both of them humorists of soaring exuberance and both of them realists of immitigable veracity.

IV

IN the dramatization of the 'Gilded Age' Mark had a silent partner, the otherwise unknown Densmore. In the two other plays of his he was working in collaboration with associates of an assured fame, Howells and Bret Harte. In neither case was he fortunate in the alliance, for they were not experts in stagecraft, altho each of them had already ventured himself in the drama. What Mark needed, if he was to trot in double harness with a running mate, was an experienced playwright with an instinctive knowledge of the theater. When Mark yoked himself with Howells or with Harte, it was the blind leading the blind. The author of 'Out of the Question' and the author of 'Two Men of Sandy Bar' lacked just what the author of the 'Gilded Age' lacked,—practice in the application of the principles of playmaking.

The play written in collaboration with Bret Harte was called 'Ah Sin,' the name of the Heathen Chineese in 'Plain Language from Truthful Jones.' It was undertaken to enable Charles Parsloe, an actor now forgotten, to profit by the skill he had displayed in the small part of a Chinaman in Bret Harte's earlier play, 'Two Men of Sandy Bar,' written for Stuart Robson,

brought out in 1876 and withdrawn after a brief and inglorious career on the stage. Bret Harte did not know enough about playmaking to perceive that its failure had been due to its deficiency in that supporting skeleton of plot which is as necessary to a drama as the equally invisible steel-frame is to a skyscraper. But he was eager to try again, and he persuaded Mark to join him. Probably he had no need to be persuasive, since Mark had found his experience with the 'Gilded Age' exhilarating and profitable. Mark invited Harte to Hartford and they set to work. As I have always been curious about the secrets of collaboration, I asked Mark many years afterward, how they had gone about it. "Well," he said, with his customary drawl, "Bret came to me at Hartford and we talked the whole thing out. Then Bret wrote the piece while I played billiards. Of course, I had to go over it and get the dialect right. Bret never did know anything about dialect."

Mr. Paine, to whom I transmitted this information, thinks that it is "scarcely a fair statement of the case," since "both authors worked on the play and worked hard." But while what Mark said to me may have been an overstatement, I doubt if it was a misstatement. The original suggestion had come from Harte; and the probability is that the major part of the

story was his also. The two partners may have worked hard but I doubt if they worked as seriously at their playmaking as they were wont to do at their story-telling. The man of letters who is not primarily a man of theater, is prone to be somewhat contemptuous in his condescending to the drama.

The play was produced in Washington in May, 1877, with Parsloe as Ah Sin. I saw it when it was brought to New York in the fall of 1877. From two of the foremost writers in America much was expected; and the result of their combined efforts was lamentably disappointing. It was unworthy of either of them, still more unworthy of both. All I can replevin from my dim recollections is a trial before Judge Lynch, which lit up the last act, and which I now recall as having more than a little of the energy and the vigor which I found afterward in the episode of the attempted lynching in 'Huckleberry Finn.' Mr. Paine tells me that the manuscript is still extant. Sooner or later it ought to be published, since nothing written by either Mark Twain or Bret Harte is negligible.

Yet this flat failure of 'Ah Sin' did not quench Mark's dramatic ardor. Even before the 'Gilded Age' had been dramatized he had begun on 'Tom Sawyer'; and his first intention was to write it as a play. Fortunately for us he soon

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perceived that Tom would have more freedom if his adventures were narrated. After Mark had published 'Tom Sawyer' he was fired with another dramatic idea; and he wrote Howells in the first flush of his enthusiasm, that he was deep in a comedy with an old detective as the principal character:

I skeltoned the first act, and *wrote* the second to-day, and am dog-tired now. Fifty-four pages of ms. in seven hours.

A few days later he wrote again, telling his friend that he had

piled up one hundred and fifty-one pages. The first, second and fourth acts are done, and done to my satisfaction too. Never had so much fun over anything in my life—such consuming interest and delight.

This piece was intended for Sol Smith Russell. But the theatrical experts to whom it was submitted did not share its author's consuming interest. Dion Boucicault said that it was better than 'Ah Sin'; but to say this was saying little. John Brougham wrote that it was "altogether too diffuse for dramatic representation." In time Mark's own opinion of his play seems to have cooled, and he put his manuscript aside. Possibly he utilized it more or less many years later when he wrote 'Tom Sawyer, Detective'; but this is mere conjecture.

Then, after a longer interval he asked Howells to collaborate with him in a sequel to Colonel Sellers; and in 'My Mark Twain' Howells has given a detailed account of their conjoint misadventure. Mark had a host of suggestions but no story, so Howells supplied one as best he could; and the two friends spent a hilarious fortnight in writing the play. Mark had quarrelled with Raymond and did not want to let him reincarnate Sellers; and yet he had ultimately to recognize that Raymond was the only actor the public would accept in the character. So the piece was sent to Raymond, who accepted it, asking for certain alterations; and then most unexpectedly he returned the manuscript, refusing to have anything to do with it. After hawking their play about, the authors arranged to produce it themselves with Burbank (who was not an actor but an elocutionist-entertainer) as Sellers,—Burbank playing the part in imitation of Raymond. At last they had lost confidence in it so completely that they paid a forfeit rather than undertake the risk of a production in New York. So it was that the 'American Claimant, or Mulberry Sellers Ten Years Later' was made visible in New York only at a special matinee in the fall of 1887. It had a few performances in unimportant out of town theaters; and then it disappeared from the stage. Still, it had not

lived in vain since it supplied material for several chapters in Mark's later novel, to which he gave the same title, without the subtitle.

After this play had been withdrawn from the boards Mark's ambition to establish himself as a dramatist did not again manifest itself. However, it is pleasant to believe that the pain of his own failure may have been more or less assuaged by the better fortune of dramatizations of two of his novels.

I have already noted that not long after the publication of the 'Prince and the Pauper' Mrs. Clemens had arranged scenes from it to be acted by members of the family and by their young friends, and that Mark himself had undertaken the part of Miles Hendon. A little later a dramatization of the whole story was made by Abby Sage Richardson; and this was produced in New York in January, 1890. It achieved instant popularity, as well it might, since the story is indisputably dramatic and since it has a more direct action than any other of Mark's novels. This version, revised by Amélie Rives, was revived in 1920 by William Faversham, who appeared as Miles Hendon. The revival met with a reception as warm as that which had greeted the original production.

In one respect this professional dramatization was inferior to Mrs. Clemens's amateur arrange-

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ment; it was so devised that one performer should assume two characters, the little Prince and the little Pauper; and this necessitated the omission of the culminating moment in the tale when the Prince and the Pauper stand face to face. And in both the amateur and the professional performances these two lads were impersonated by girls. This may have been necessary, since it is almost impossible to find competent boy actors, while there are girl actors aplenty; but none the less was it unfortunate, since a girl is never entirely satisfactory in boy's clothes. Very rarely can she conceal from us the fact that she is a girl, doing her best to be a boy. Curiously enough, boys can act girls' parts and make us forget for the moment that they are not what they seem.

Five years after Mrs. Richardson had dramatized the 'Prince and the Pauper,' Frank Mayo made a most effective play out of 'Pudd'nhead Wilson.' He arranged the title-part for his own vigorous and impressive acting. He simplified Mark's story and he amplified it; he condensed it and he heightened it; he preserved the ingenious incidents and the veracious characters; he made his profit out of the telling dialog; and he was skilful in disentangling the essentially dramatic elements of Mark's rather rambling story. He produced it in New York in the spring

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of 1895. Mark was then in Europe; but when he returned he made haste to see the piece. He was discovered by the audience and called upon for a speech, in which he congratulated the player-playwright on a "delightful play." He ended by saying, "Confidentially I have always had an idea that I was well equipt to write plays, but I have never encountered a manager who has agreed with me"—which was not strictly accurate since two different managers had accepted the 'Gilded Age' and 'Ah Sin.'

V

WHEN the 'Gilded Age' was brought out in New York in the fall of 1874, Mark climbed the eighty steps which led to the editorial offices of the New York *World*, then in the control of Manton Marble. He asked for the city editor and he was shown into the cubicle occupied by William C. Brownell. He explained that he had come to ask the editor to puff his play; whereupon Brownell inquired if it was a good play. "No," was Mark's drawling answer, "it isn't a good play. It's a bad play, a damned bad play. I couldn't write a good play. But it has a good character. I can write character; and that character is the best I can do. If it was a good play,

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I shouldn't have had to climb up here to ask you to puff it."

Here Mark was unconsciously revealing his agreement with Aristotle, the master of all who know. Aristotle declared that in a tragedy—and the remark is even more applicable to comedy—plot is more important than character, since you can have an appealing drama without character but you cannot have it without plot. Lowell said the same thing in more detail, in one of his lectures on the 'Old English Dramatists.'

In a play we not only expect a succession of scenes, but that each scene should lead by a logic more or less stringent, if not to the next, at any rate to something that is to follow and that all should contribute their fraction of impulse to the inevitable catastrophe. That is to say, the structure should be organic, with a necessary and harmonious connection and relation of parts, and not merely mechanical with an arbitrary or haphazard joining of one part to another.

It was this constructive skill that Mark lacked. He could create characters; he could make them reveal themselves in appropriate situations; he could carry on a story which in the library would delight all of us, but which was without the compact directness demanded by us when we are in the theater. He possessed all the qualifications of the dramatist except the one thing needful, without which the rest are unavailing; he could

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not organize a structure with the necessary and harmonious connection and relation of its parts. In other words he was devoid of the engineering draftsmanship which plans the steel-frame, four-square to all the winds that blow.

He may have had—indeed, he did have—dramatic genius; but he never acquired the theatrical talent which would make his genius available. He could not cut and polish and set his own diamonds.

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X

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I

THE publication of Henry James's Letters must have drawn the attention of many readers to the fact that James took an interest in the drama as an art second only to his interest in the novel. It has also informed these readers as to his long-nursed ambition to make money by writing plays,—an ambition always frustrated by malign fate. Probably only a few of those who first became aware of his dramatic aspirations by the disclosures in this correspondence will recall the evidence in his published works which testifies to his always apt appreciation of the art of acting and his ever persistent inquisitiveness as to the principles of playmaking. He came forward as a dramatic critic more often than is generally remembered; and his dramatic criticism is more intelligent, that is to say, it shows a better understanding of the theater, than we had a right to expect from one who gave himself up to another art, that of prose fiction, closely akin to the art of the drama and yet widely divergent from it.

So many were Henry James's excursions into the field of dramatic criticism that there are enough of them to fill a volume; and perhaps the task of making the collection will yet be undertaken by one of his staunch admirers. The book will be more welcome since James rescued only a few of these papers from magazines for which they were originally written. It may be well to list here the major part of the contents of this future gathering, certain to have a cordial reception from all students of the stage. In 1874 Henry James anonymously contributed to the *Atlantic* a discriminating (but somewhat chilly) consideration of the revival of the 'School for Scandal' by the competent company of comedians who were then making brilliant the stage of the Boston Museum. In 1875 he gave to the *Galaxy* an illuminating review of Tennyson's 'Queen Mary,' effectively contrasting it with Victor Hugo's more melodramatic treatment of the same enigmatic heroine in 'Marie Tudor.' In 1875 again he included in his 'Transatlantic Sketches' an earlier letter on the 'Parisian Stage.' In 1876 he wrote, again for the *Galaxy*, his enthusiastic appreciation of the actors and actresses of the Comédie-Française, which he reprinted in 1878 in his volume of essays on the 'French Poets and Novelists.' In these early days he prepared for one periodical or another articles on Ristori and on Salvini, on Henry Ir-

ving as Macbeth and on Macready's Diary (all duly catalogued in Phillips's exhaustive bibliography).

For the *Galaxy* again in 1877 he wrote a review of the 'London Stage,' and in 1887 he contributed to the *Century* his glowing tribute to that most consummate comedian, Coquelin. He seems to have overlooked both of these papers when he was selecting material for his successive volumes of essays in criticism; and it is not easy to understand why it was that he forgot the study of Coquelin. It is one of the most luminous of histrionic portraits, worthy to hang beside the best of Colley Cibber's and Charles Lamb's. He was never more cordially enthusiastic about any artist than he was about the incomparable Coquelin, the most gifted and the most versatile comic actor of the last three decades of the nineteenth century. I recall that when I drew Coquelin's attention to this superb testimony to his talent, the actor smiled with pleasure. "Henry James," he said. "Yes, it appears that I have the privilege of throwing him into an ecstasy!" In 1915 Henry James was kind enough to revise this essay, so that it might serve as an introduction to Coquelin's own analysis of 'Art and the Actor' when that was reprinted in the second series of the publications of the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University.

It remains to be recorded only that Henry James included among his 'Essays in London and Elsewhere' two papers on Ibsen's plays, originally written in 1891 and 1893: and that in his 'Notes on Novelists' he preserved a paper on Alexandre Dumas fils, written in 1895. Quite probably there may be other articles on theatrical themes contributed to one or another of the newspapers for which he served now and again as correspondent from Paris or from London. And not to be omitted from this record is the long story called the 'Tragic Muse,' one of the most veracious of theatrical novels; it was published in 1890.

From one or another of his dramatic criticisms I could borrow not a few pregnant passages, revelations of his penetrating insight into the inexorable conditions under which the playwright must do his work. Here is an early remark, culled from a letter on the Parisian stage, written in 1872:

An acted play is a novel, intensified; it realizes what the novel suggests, and by paying a liberal tribute to the senses, anticipates your possible complaint that your entertainment is of the meager sort styled intellectual.

This does not pierce to the marrow of the matter; it does not detail all the difference between

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the acted play and the novel; but it has its significance, none the less. In the same letter Henry James ventures to speak of the "colossal flimsiness" of the 'Dame aux Camélias.' Now Dumas's pathetic play may be more or less false, but it is not flimsy; it must have had a solidity of its own, and even a certain sincerity of a kind, since it kept the stage for three-score years and ten.

Here, however, is a long paragraph from the paper on Tennyson's 'Queen Mary' (written in 1875), which discloses an indisputable insight into the difficulties of the dramatist's art:

The fine thing in a real drama, generally speaking, is that, more than any other work of literary art, it needs a masterly structure. It needs to be shaped and fashioned and laid together, and this process makes a demand upon an artist's rarest gifts. He must combine and arrange, interpolate and eliminate, play the joiner with the most attentive skill; and yet at the end effectually bury his tools and his sawdust, and invest his elaborate skeleton with the smoothest and most polished integument. The five-act drama—serious or humorous, poetic or prosaic—is like a box of fixed dimensions and inelastic material, into which a mass of precious things are to be packed away. The precious things in question seem out of all proportion to the compass of the receptacle; but the artist has an assurance that with patience and skill a place may be made for each, and that nothing need be clipped or crumpled, squeezed or damaged. The false dramatist either

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knocks out the sides of his box or plays the deuce with the contents; the real one gets down on his knees, disposes of his goods tentatively, this, that, and the other way, loses his temper but keeps his ideal, and at last rises in triumph, having packed his coffer in the one way that is mathematically right. It closes perfectly, and the lock turns with a click; between one object and another you cannot insert the point of a penknife.

It will be enough to risk only one more quotation,—this time from the paper evoked by the first performance of Ibsen's 'Hedda Gabler' in London in 1891:

The stage is to the prose drama (and Ibsen's later manner is the very prose of prose) what the tune is to the song or the concrete case to the general law. It immediately becomes apparent that he needs the test to show his strength and the frame to show his picture. An extraordinary process of vivification takes place; the conditions seem essentially enlarged. Those of the stage in general strike us for the most part as small enough, so that the game played in them is often not more inspiring than a successful sack-race. But Ibsen reminds us that if they did not in themselves confer life, they can at least receive it when the infusion is artfully administered. Yet how much of it they were doomed to receive from 'Hedda Gabler' was not to be divined till we had seen 'Hedda Gabler' in the frame. The play, on perusal, left us comparatively muddled and mystified, fascinated but—in one's intellectual sympathy—snubbed. Acted, it leads that sympathy over the straightest of roads with all the exhilaration of a superior pace.

Nothing could be better than that, nothing could make clearer the immitigable fact that the full measure of the essential power of any drama can be gauged only in the actual theater, to the special conditions of which it has been scientifically adjusted.

II

IN default as yet of a circumstantial biography which shall set before us the successive but perpetually unsuccessful efforts which Henry James made to establish himself as a dramatist, we must find what materials we may in his correspondence and in the explanatory prefaces which their editor prefixt to the several chronological sections into which he chose to distribute the letters. First and last, Henry James seems to have composed eight plays, three of which underwent the ordeal by fire before the footlights.

His earliest attempt was an amplification of 'Daisy Miller,' a short-story which had attained an immediate vogue. This dramatization was made in 1882 on commission from the managers of the Madison Square Theater in New York. But it was not found acceptable to them; and the author took it over to London and read it to the managers of the St. James's Theater, but without winning a more favorable opinion. Unable to arrange for performance, he resigned

himself to publication; and it appeared as a book in 1883.

Half-a-dozen years later he became discouraged at his inability to maintain the popularity which he had tasted earlier in his career as a novelist; and he persuaded himself that he might win a wider audience as a writer of plays than as a writer of novels. He asserted more than once that he was persuaded to playmaking by the patent fact that it was more immediately remunerative than story-telling; but this assertion seems to be the result of a certain self-deception, as one of his letters, written to his brother in 1891, proves that he was convinced of his richer endowment for the drama than for prose-fiction:

The strange thing is that I have always known this (the drama) was my more characteristic form. . . . As for the form itself its honor and inspiration are its difficulty. If it were easy to write a good play I couldn't and wouldn't think of it; but it is in fact damnable hard.

A little later, in a letter to Stevenson, he wrote that he was finding that the dramatic form opened out before him "as if there were a kingdom to conquer. . . . I feel as if I had at last found my form—my real one—that for which pale fiction is an ineffectual substitute."

When he turned to the theater he was not exploring an unknown country. He had been a constant playgoer, ever inquisitive about all manifestations of the twin arts of the stage, the histrionic and the dramaturgic. Whenever he was in Paris he sat night after night absorbing the best that the Comédie-Française could give him; and Sunday he profited by the sane solidity of the dramatic criticisms of Francisque Sarcey, from whom few of the secrets of the art of the stage were hidden. As early as 1878 he had written to his brother: "My inspection of the French theater will fructify. I have thoroly mastered Dumas, Augier and Sardou; and I know all they know and a great deal more besides." And in another letter (also to his brother) in 1895, he dwelt on the double difficulty of the novelist who turns dramatist, the question of method and the question of subject:

If he is really in earnest, as I have been, he surmounts the former difficulty before he surmounts the latter. I have worked like a horse—far harder than any one will ever know—over the whole stiff mystery of technic. I have run it to earth, and I don't in the least hesitate to say that, for the comparatively poor and meager, the piteously simplified, purposes of the English stage, I have made it absolutely my own, put it in my pocket.

That this was not empty vaunting, and that his keen and cool critical insight had led him to

grasp the chief of the essential qualities of the drama, as distinguished from prose-fiction, is proved by a passage in a letter written in 1909 to a friend who had sent him a published piece of hers, which seemed to him undramatic in that it lacked "an action, a progression," whereby it was deprived of the needful tenseness:

A play appears to me of necessity to involve a struggle, a question of whether and how, will it or won't it happen? And if so, or not so, how and why?—which we have the suspense, the curiosity, the anxiety, the *tension*, in a word of seeing; and which means that the whole thing shows an attack upon *oppositions*—with the victory or the failure on one side or the other, and each wavering and shifting from point to point.

Here Henry James is at one with Ferdinand Brunetière, when the French critic laid down what he called the Law of the Drama,—that if a play is to arouse and retain the interest of audiences it must present a struggle, a clash of contending desires; it must exhibit the stark assertion of the human will.

Henry James's second play was like his first, a dramatization of one of his own stories, a stage-version of the 'American.' It was more fortunate than the stage-version of 'Daisy Miller,' in that it did thrust itself into the theater, where it lived only a brief life. It was produced in 1891 by Edward Compton in England,

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at first in the provinces and then for a few performances in London. When he commenced playwriting Henry James did not appreciate that it is a more difficult task to dramatize a novel than to compose an original play, since the author is necessarily unable to deal with his material as freely as he could if it were still molten and had not already been run into the mold of a narrative. Seemingly he made this discovery in due course; and he did not again attempt to turn any of his stories into plays.

His third effort was an original piece, 'Guy Domville,' brought out by Sir George Alexander at the St. James's Theater in 1895. That it failed to be favorably received and that it had to be withdrawn at the end of a month, was a grievous disappointment to the author,—a disappointment made more poignant by the gross discourtesy, not to call it wanton brutality, with which he was received by a portion of the audience when he was called before the curtain at the end of the first performance. It was perhaps due to this indignity that he did not publish the play which had failed on the stage in the natural expectation that it might please in the study, appealing from the noisy verdict of its spectators to the quieter judgment of its possible readers.

He had already, the year before, printed in

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two volumes, entitled 'Theatricals,' four other comedies which he had vainly proffered to the managers,—'Tenants,' 'Disengaged,' the 'Album,' and the 'Reprobate.' One other play he turned into a tale, called 'Covering End,' published in 1898. Here he was not contending with any insuperable difficulty in transposition, since the novel may very well be dramatic, whereas the play shrinks in abhorrence from any tincture of the epic.

The drama never lost its attraction for Henry James, but he was repelled, as well as repulsed, by the theater, wherein it has its domicile. In 1893 he wrote to his brother:

The whole odiousness of the thing lies in the connection between the drama and the theater; the one is admirable in its interest and its difficulty, the other loathsome in its conditions. If the drama could only be theoretically or hypothetically acted, the fascination resident in its all but unconquerable form would be unimpaired, and one would be able to have the exquisite exercise without the horrid sacrifice.

This was a suggestion natural enough in a retiring and fastidious artist in letters, but inconceivable in the mouth of any born playwright, Shakspeare or Molière, Sheridan or Beaumarchais, in whom the pain was physicked by the labor they delighted in.

Notwithstanding his distaste for any other

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than a theoretic or hypothetical playhouse, Henry James in 1908, ten years after the publication of 'Covering End,' did not hesitate to disinter the one-act play upon which it had been founded and to authorize its performance. He even permitted it to be cut into three acts,—just as Scribe four-score years earlier had made a three-act comedy, 'Valérie,' out of a one-act comédie-vaudeville, by the simple expedient of excising the songs and of dropping the curtain twice during the course of the action. The new-old three-act piece was entitled the 'High Bid'; it was performed a few times in the provinces and a few times more in London by the Forbes-Robertsons. But it did not make any definite impression on the playgoing public. It was not a disheartening failure like 'Guy Domville,' yet it could not be called a success. Still, its milder reception encouraged its author to resume work on two more plays, the 'Other House' and the 'Outcry.' There were even negotiations for the production of these pieces,—negotiations which came to nothing, chiefly because prolonged illness forced him to give up work on them.

III

IN the deprecatory note which he prefixt to the second volume of 'Theatricals,' Henry James declared that

the man who pretends to the drama has more to learn, in fine, than any other pretender; and his dog's eared grammar comes at last to have the remarkable peculiarity of seeming a revelation he himself shall have made.

Plainly enough he had the conviction that to him the revelation was complete and that he had his self-made grammar by heart. Why then did he fail after efforts so persistent and so strenuous? Why did disaster follow fast and follow faster? It was plainly not from any lapse in painstaking or any easy ignoring of the difficulties of the dangerous task. It was not because his primary motive was pecuniary, since he was soon seized with ardor in his adventures into a new art. What then was it?

I think that we can find a key to the secret in his letters wherein he more than once exhibits his detestation of the audience he was aiming to amuse. He wrote to his brother in 1895:

The thing fills me with horror for the abysmal vulgarity and brutality of the theater and its regular pub-

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lic, which God knows I have had intensely, even when working (from motives as pure as pecuniary motives can be) against it.

What right had any man to hope that he might gain the suffrages of spectators he so totally detested and despised? Henry James here takes an attitude, he discloses a frame of mind, as dissimilar as may be from the mighty masters of the drama,—from Corneille's or Molière's, for example.

In 1911 he wrote to a friend that

the conditions—the theater-question generally—in this country (England) are horrific and unspeakable. Utter, and as far as I can see, irreclaimable barbarism reigns. The anomalous fact is that the theater, so called, can flourish in barbarism, but that any drama worth speaking of can develop but in the air of civilization.

That assertion implies a belief that England was less civilized in the opening years of the twentieth century than it had been in the opening years of the seventeenth. Many things may be said against the present age, but hardly that it is less civilized than that of James I.

We may dismiss these two opinions as the petulances of a man of delicate sensibilities abraded to exacerbation by gross contacts with the vulgar herd. None the less are contacts with the herd inherent in the playwright's trade.

He cannot retire into any ivory tower; he must come down to the market place; only at his peril can he shrink from meeting his fellow man. He is disqualified for the drama which appeals, has always appealed and always will appeal, to the mass, to the common herd, if he holds himself aloof, if his sympathy is not sufficient to make him for the moment one of the throng, to feel as the mass feels, even if he feels more acutely, to think as the plain people think, even if he thinks more wisely. At bottom the drama must be fundamentally democratic, since it depends upon the majority.

The great dramatists did not succeed by writing down to the mob, but by writing broad to humanity. They did not have to deliberate and to quest about for the things to which the many-headed public would respond; they knew, for they themselves thrilled with the same passions, the same desires and the same ideals. They had an assured solidarity with their fellow-citizens, whom they faced on the plane of equality and whom they did not look down on from any altitude of conscious superiority. They never condescended; they were never even tempted to condescension. They gave to the throng, made up of all manner of men, literate and illiterate, the best they had in them, the very best. Nor did they feel that in so doing they were making

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any sacrifice. They were stout of heart and strong of stomach, with no drooping tendrils of exquisite delicacy.

Perhaps it would be unfair to suggest that when he was engaged in playwriting Henry James was unconsciously condescending; but it is not unfair to assert that he had no solidarity with the spectators he was hoping to attract and delight. What he gave them—the note prefix to ‘Theatricals’ proves it amply—was as good as he thought they deserved or could understand; it was not his best. And even if he had designed to give them his best, he could not have done it, because a miniaturist cannot make himself over into a scene-painter. The two arts may demand an equal ability but the hand that works in either, soon subdued to what it works in, is incapacitated for the other. The supersubtleties in which Henry James excelled were impossible in the theater; they demand time to be taken in, an allowance impossible to the swiftness of the stage; they would not get across the footlights; and they might puzzle even the most enlightened spectators. It takes an immense experience and a marvelous skill “to paint in broad strokes, but so artfully that at a distance it appears as if we had painted in miniature,”—which, so the Spanish dramatist Benavente tells us, “is at once the problem and the art of the drama.”

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In his review of the 'School for Scandal,' Henry James confessed that he saw

no reason to believe that the mass of mankind will ever be more artistic than is strikingly convenient, and we suspect that acute pleasure or pain, on this line, will remain the privilege of an initiated minority.

The supreme leaders of the drama, Sophocles, Shakspeare and Molière, were satisfied to rely on the "mass of mankind," of whose sympathies they had an intuitive understanding. Henry James, all unwittingly it may be, was addressing himself only to the "initiated minority." Where the leaders possessed robust straightforwardness and direct brevity, he was solitary, isolated, acutely fastidious. He must have read but he did not take to heart Joubert's warning that we ought, "in writing, to remember that men of culture are present, but it is not to them that we should speak." Henry James's novels would have been more widely enjoyed if he had profited by this precept; and because he did not profit by it his plays are "all silent and all damned."

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XI

STAGE HUMOR

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I

WHEN we consider the antics indulged in by actors of the custard-pie comedies which make many of us guffaw violently as they succeed one another on the screen and when we analyze the witticisms which make many of us smile appreciatively as they cascade down the dialog of Sheridan's 'School for Scandal,' we disclose that our laughter, gentle as it may be or boisterous as it is more often, can be aroused by two distinct factors, by the shock of surprise and by the reaction of an awakened sense of superiority. Wit delights us by its exploding unexpectedness; and humor awakens pity for its victims and also pride that we are not as weak as they are, not as short-sighted or as muddle-headed, not as prone to make fools of ourselves.

As the simplest and easiest form of wit is a play on words and as the simplest and easiest form of humor is a practical joke, we need not

be surprized that the comedies and farces of 'prentice playwrights are likely to crackle with an arbitrary collocation of vocables so put together as to create at least the semblance of wit and also that these firstlings of the comic muse are likely to contain episodes of arbitrarily built up practical joking. These two characteristics are infallible witnesses to the juvenility of the author of any play in which they are abundant. Marlowe died young; and this may account for the dreary emptiness of the would-be comic scenes in 'Doctor Faustus' with their perverse practical jokery. If we needed internal evidence to corroborate the external proof that 'Love's Labor's Lost' is one of Shakspeare's earliest comedies we could find it in his obviously painstaking effort to achieve verbal brilliance and in the palpably artificial play-within-the-play lugged into the final act so that one group of characters can laugh at another group, created solely to serve as butts for the merriment of their associates.

As Shakspeare was an Elizabethan Englishman he outgrew his relish for puns very slowly; and he retained his willingness to rely on the practical joke as a basis for comic situations even as late as the middle of his career, when he wrote the last and tenderest of his romantic comedies, 'Twelfth Night.' It is only fair to admit that

the trick which Maria and Sir Toby play upon Malvolio is not an empty mechanism; it is just what those two delightful companions would devise to get even with the cross-gartered Puritan and to punish him for his paraded self-sufficiency. So the trick which Prince Hal and Poins play upon Falstaff and which prompts him to the noble narrative of his combat with the men in buckram,—this also is completely in accordance with the character of the fat knight and of the future king; and moreover it serves most admirably to reveal Falstaff's superb imperturbability and his infinite resourcefulness in extricating himself from a morass wherein a slow-witted man would have sunk helpless.

With the mad Prince and Poins we laugh at Falstaff, no doubt; but we are ready also to laugh with him, because he is so humorously human. We like him even if we cannot have any respect for him; in fact, we like him so much that we are a little inclined to resent the way in which his creator has chosen to treat him in more than one episode of the 'Merry Wives,' especially his concealment in the buckbasket of foul linen and his subsequent upsetting into foul water. Shakspeare, even tho his masterpieces may survive for all time, was himself a man of his own time; and at the end of the sixteenth century people were more callous than they are at the beginning of

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the twentieth, thicker of skin and stouter of stomach, more tolerant of needless pain and even of purposeless brutality. We cannot doubt that Shakspeare must have been a spectator at "the whipping of the blind bear"; and to him as to other Elizabethans madness was comic rather than tragic. To-day we have for Malvolio, and even for Shylock, a sympathy which is born of a better understanding and which assuredly would astonish no one more than it would Shakspeare.

George Eliot, with her shrewd insight into the recesses of human nature, declared that "a difference of taste in jests is a great strain on the affections"; and there is no doubt that our affection for Shakspeare is now and again not a little strained by his eager pursuit of the obvious pun and by his persistent employment of the obvious practical joke. Our taste in jests is more restricted than his; and we labor in vain to excuse him by the plea that he descended to the pun and the practical joke only to gratify the ruder likings of the groundlings who stood restless in the unroofed yard of the Globe Theater. It is simpler, and it is honester, to admit frankly, first of all, that Shakspeare was a right Elizabethan Englishman who shared the tastes of his contemporaries and his countrymen; and second, that the false glitter of dialog and the artificial

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practical joking are simply testimony to the immaturity of his genius at the time when he composed the comic dramas in which we discover these defects. Not only has our taste in jests changed in more than three centuries, but Shakspeare's own taste in jests changed in less than twenty years. In his later masterpieces, in the best plays of his best period, the wit is intellectual rather than verbal and the humor is sympathetically human.

II

GEORGE ELIOT, to quote her again, makes one of her philosophic characters declare that a liking for Bellini's music "indicates a puerile state of culture." Certainly the liking for practical jokes is an even more certain indication of this condition. And "puerile" is an aptly chosen adjective, since the practical joke is boyish; and boys are pitiably uncivilized. Until they tame their native energy they are callous to the sufferings of others and they even enjoy cruelties they inflict in the spontaneous expression of their thereby demonstrated superiority. Just as the Clown in the pantomime butters the slide so that the Pantaloon shall slip and tumble down tumultuously, so the boy in real life delights in disguising the frozen pavement with scattered snow so that the unsuspecting gentleman in spectacles

will make a violent and vain struggle to keep his balance. This evokes joyful shouts from the youthful perpetrators of the unkindly act. If a grown-up happens to witness the mishap he is not moved to laughter; his immediate impulse is to go to the aid of the elderly victim.

Yet this same grown-up when he is one of the audience at a pantomime reverts to the puerile stage of culture and becomes a child again; for the two hours' traffic of the stage he is subdued to what he gazes at; and he may be moved to loud merriment by deeds which, seen in the street, would cause him instantly to summon the police. He laughingly approves of the unprovoked assassinations of Punch.

We are assured by scientific investigators that civilization is only a thin veneer at best and that beneath the courtesy of the most civilized society there lie dormant the archaic instincts of primitive man. However remote we may think ourselves from our probably arboreal ancestor, the beast within us is never dead; and he is ever ready to rouse himself from his long slumber and to put us to shame sometimes by his blood-lust and sometimes by his monkey-tricks.

The scientists also assert that every one of us, from his conception to his coming of age, passes through the successive stages of the evolution of mankind, slowly rising year by year from sav-

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agery to barbarism and from barbarism to civilization (supposing that he is lucky enough to progress so far). If this must be admitted, then we need not be surprized that the audiences in our theaters can be interested by wit which is juvenile and by humor which is primitive. These audiences are made up of all sorts and conditions of men, in every stage of development. Even if we assume that most of these spectators are civilized (perhaps a precarious assumption), we cannot doubt that only a few of them have attained to a high level of culture; and by this very attainment these more advanced members of the audience are separated from the main body, which has not progressed in its preferences so far away from its ruder and cruder progenitors.

The larger the theater itself, the more closely compacted the spectators, the more primitive is the comic effect which will provoke the swiftest and the most uproarious response; and the refined and delicate-minded minority finds itself conforming to the primitive tastes of the less particular majority, even if it does so only for the moment. While the curtain is up the high-brow has a fellow-feeling with his low-brow companions; and he is therefore willing not merely to smile deprecatingly but even to laugh heartily at mechanical dislocations of the vocabulary and

at equally mechanical practical jokes. When he is a spectator of the passing show, the self-conscious Pharisee of culture will consent to fellowship with publicans and with sinners.

In one of his earlier philosophical inquiries, that in which he analyzed the sources of laughter, Bergson recalled the old story of the man in church who remained dry-eyed when the rest of the congregation were dissolved in tears by the pathos of the sermon and who explained his failure to be moved as due to the fact that he did not "belong to that parish." And Bergson asserted that this explanation, absurd as it may seem, is not unsatisfactory or illogical, if applied to laughter rather than to tears. "However hearty a laugh may be," the French philosopher declared, "it always conceals an afterthought of complicity with other laughers, real or imaginary."

So it is that when the spectators refuse to become accomplices before the fact, there is no certainty that they will respond to the wit or to the humor of the play they are witnessing. Only when they have yielded themselves to a communal intimacy, so to call it, can the dramatist find an immediate appreciation of his merry jests. Shakspeare spoke out of abundant experience as player and as playwright when he declared that "a jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him that

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hears it." And Goethe was no less shrewd when he asserted that "nothing is more significant of men's character than what they find laughable."

III

THE French, who have an armory of critical terms both more exact and more abundant than ours, distinguish between three different kinds of stage-humor. There is, first of all, the mere witticism, the sentence laughable in itself, the so-called epigram; and this they term the *mot d'esprit*. Second, there is the phrase which derives its comic effect not from itself but from its utterance at a given moment in the movement of the story; and this they speak of as the *mot de situation*. Thirdly, there is the word or the sentence whereby a character expresses himself unexpectedly, unconsciously turning the flashlight on the unexplored recesses of his own soul; and they are wont to call this the *mot de caractère*.

It is the first of these, the witticism existing for its own sake and sufficient with itself, detachable from the dialog, not integrated with either character or situation, merely a merry jest at large, it is verbal glitter of this sort which is essentially juvenile, which we may expect in the piece of 'prentice playwrights and which we find

in the early comedies of Shakspeare; more especially in 'Love's Labor's Lost.'

Thomas Moore, in his brilliant biography of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, called attention to the fact that English comedy, from the 'Way of the World' to the 'School for Scandal,' was the work of young men, who either died before they attained intellectual maturity or abandoned the theater; and in the juvenility of these comic playwrights, from Congreve to Sheridan, we can see the explanation and the excuse for the verbal fireworks which explode all down their dialog. So the younger Dumas was under thirty when he wrote the 'Demi-Monde' with its elaborately paraded epigram; and he was over fifty when he composed 'Frauillon' with its dialog bathed in wit and yet devoid of detachable dewdrops. So Oscar Wilde left us only the comedies composed when he was comparatively youthful; and he had perforce to give up playwriting before he had attained to artistic sincerity. His epigrams, often amusing in themselves, are half of them taken out of his note-book to be tacked arbitrarily into his dialog. They may glitter like spangles but they are only sewed on. The built up repartees and the manufactured retorts of Wilde's characters are sometimes too rude to be probable in the polite society which the author took a snobbish pride in putting into his plays; but at least they

lacked the bare brutality of the rejoinders we find in Congreve's comedies and more particularly in Wycherly's, rejoinders which recall Goldsmith's criticism of Johnson as a conversationalist, that "whenever the doctor's pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt."

Even Sir Arthur Pinero in his juvenile pieces fell victim to a prevailing epidemic of epigram. At least, I can adduce one specimen of his youthful effort in his very youthful play, 'Imprudence.' As it was unsuccessful it has remained unpublisht, and I must therefore rely on my memory. The lovers have quarreled and parted forever. This is at an afternoon tea; and when the time comes for the young lady to go home, the young gentleman approaches her with the courteously formal query, "Shall I call you a hansom?" To which she retorts, "You are mean enough to call me anything!" Many things, no doubt, must be pardoned to a young lady who is desperately in love and who has just broken with her devoted lover; but this impossible repartee is not one of them. Sir Arthur Pinero's dialog in his later social dramas is nervous, tense, highly individual, and totally devoid of these outgrown artificialities; and in them he evokes laughter by the clash of character on character. His piercing sayings are the product of essential wisdom and not of external wit.

It is evidence of Molière's early maturity that there are no *mots d'esprit* even in his most brilliant comedies. He eschewed the empty witticism; and in his 'Criticism of the School for Wives' he explained with conscious pride that the jokes in his dialog were not put there for their own sake; they were meant to illustrate situation and character. Molière has his clever sayings, his epigrams and his aphorisms, but they are always germane; they are *mots de situation* and *mots de caractère*, and never merely *mots d'esprit*. More than any other comic dramatist does Molière deserve the praise that William Archer once bestowed on Bronson Howard, that his good things grow out of his story, "like blossoms on a laburnum," and are not "stuck on like candles on a Christmas tree."

The same commendation may be given to Sir James Barrie, who has now come into his own and has conquered his juvenile tendency to get his laugh by whimsicalities lugged in by main strength,—like the husband's amputation of the excrescences of his wife's hat, in the 'Professor's Love Story.' In the later 'Dear Brutus' the whole fabric of the story is whimsical and fantastic, fanciful and delightful. To a play like this we may apply Goethe's characterization of Claude Lorraine's faery palaces, that it was "absolute truth—without a sign of reality." At its

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performance little ripples of intimate laughter ran around the audience, never breaking into a unanimous guffaw. The humor of the dialog may be, as indeed it must be, the humor of Barrie himself; but it seems to us the spontaneous utterance of the character from whose mouth it comes.

IV

THE *mot de caractère*, the word or the sentence whereby a character expresses himself unconsciously, "giving himself away," as the American phrase is, this is not to be confounded with that ancient stage-trick, the catch-word, repeated again and again with the hope and expectation that it will become more laughable the more often it is heard. The catch-word may be effective when it is used with artful discretion; but it is a dangerous device likely at last to annoy a large part of the audience. Since Corporal Nym companions Falstaff in the 'Merry Wives' as well as in 'Henry IV' we may infer that he had found favor in the eyes of the spectators at the Globe, or else Shakspeare would not have carried him over from play to play; and yet modern audiences soon weary of Nym's inability to open his mouth without letting fall the word *humor*. "That's the humor of it" is not at all humorous to-day.

But even the catch-word, said once and said again, and then said yet once more, may be made to serve as a *mot de caractère*, as a revelation of character. In Molière's 'Fourberies de Scapin,' when the befooled father is told that his beloved son has rashly adventured himself on board a Turkish galley and has been seized and held for ransom, his reiterated query,—“But what the devil was he doing on that galley?”—is increasingly mirth-provoking because it is exactly the futile protest which that foolish parent would put forth again and again in that particular predicament.

In itself the question,—“What the devil was he doing on that galley?”—is not at all funny; it becomes funny only because of its utterance at a given moment by a given person. It is not quotable by itself, since it is meaningless when detached from its context. Nor is there anything funny in the remark, “It is at least as long since I was in a bank!” or in the query, “Why don't you?” None the less have I heard the remark and the query arouse abundant laughter.

When David Warfield played the part of a stage-Jew in one of the Weber and Fields nondescript spectacles, cleverly compounded of glitter and gaiety, he had a brief dialog with a subordinate stage-Jew. This feeder explained in detail

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how he had taken out a fire insurance policy on his store and on his stock in trade for at least twice their value. When Warfield heard this, he looked puzzled for a moment and then he asked, "Vel, vy don't you?"

The elder Sothern took an unsuccessful comedy of H. J. Byron's, the 'Prompter's Box,' renamed it the 'Crushed Tragedian' and rewrote it so that he might himself appear as a broken-down old actor, fallen upon evil days but forever puffed with pride in his own histrionic achievements. He comes in contact with a banker, who, when he learns that Sothern is an actor, makes the remark that "It must be ten years since I was in a theater." Whereupon the crushed tragedian, drawing himself up and draping himself in imaginary robes, delivers the annihilating retort, "It must be at least as long since I was in a bank!"

It is a little difficult to decide whether these two examples illustrate the *mot de caractère* or the *mot de situation*, since they illuminate both character and situation. But the *mot de situation* can exist independently, relying for its effect solely upon the moment in the action when it is spoken. In a forgotten farce called 'French Flats,' Stuart Robson was warned to keep out of the way of a certain tenor, who was fiercely and fierily jealous. A little later we saw him ven-

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ture into a room wherein we knew the operatic Othello to be concealed; and when he reappeared with his clothes torn from him and with a woe-begone expression, we waited expectantly for him to explain,—“The tenor was behind the door.” This sentence, innocent of all humor when taken by itself apart from the situation, was only the eagerly looked for explosion of a bomb fired by the long fuse which has been sputtering in full sight of the spectators.

V

MUCH ingenuity has been expended in trying to draw a hard and fast line between qualities which are closely akin, between talent and genius, for example. We are told that “talent does what it can and genius does what it must”; and this sounds impressive, no doubt, but it does not get us any forwarder. It implies a distinction in kind which is difficult to prove. So it is with the corresponding attempts to distinguish sharply between wit and humor. We can see clearly enough that many of Sheridan’s clever things are wit, beyond all question; and we can also see that most of Molière’s clever things are humor; but there remain not a few laughter-provoking effects which it is almost impossible to classify. Perhaps some of them cannot fairly be en-

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titled either witty or humorous; they are just funny.

In one of Charles Hoyt's unpretending farcical comedies, all of them unhesitatingly American, new births of our new soil, there was a droll creature who found it amusing to purloin a succession of articles from a certain house, crossing the stage again and again at intervals bearing out the objects he was appropriating, the last of these being nothing less than a red-hot stove. On one of his earlier marauding expeditions he came before the audience with a huge ostrich egg in one hand and with a tiny bantam chicken in the other. He came down to the footlights and stood for a moment looking first at the egg and then at the hen, with growing amazement. Finally he said, "Well, I don't believe it!"

Now, I cannot call the remark witty in itself, and I am not at all sure that it is humorous; but it is funny,—at least this was the unanimous opinion of the joyful audience. Equally funny was a brief scene in another of the nondescript spectacles of Weber and Fields. There was on one side of the stage, not too near the footlights, the portico of a house, over which was a ground glass globe with an electric bulb inside it. Weber and Fields came on together; and Weber remarked, as they faced the audience: "This is his house. I know it because he told me it had a

white light over the door." (For the benefit of my readers I shall spare them the dialect which intensified the flavor of the ensuing dialog.)

"A white light?" said Fields. "I didn't see a white light." At that moment the globe became red just as Fields turned to look at it. "That isn't a white light," he asserted when he again faced the audience. "It's a red light!"

"I tell you it's a white light. I saw it," said Weber; and when he twisted his head to steal a glimpse of the globe it had again changed its color. "I bet you five dollars it is a white light!"

"Five dollars?" cried Fields looking over his shoulder at the light, which had then become red. "I bet you ten dollars it is a red light!"

"Ten dollars?" shouted Weber, "I—I—" Then he cautiously stole a look at the globe, which was once more innocent of any color. "I bet you fifty dollars it is a white light!"

When Fields, in his turn, looked back the globe was red, and he instantly raised his bet to a hundred dollars.

I forget how high the wager mounted at last, each of the pair feeling assured that he was betting on a certainty; but at last they had wagered all they possessed and with the stakes in their hands, they slowly revolved to gaze at the light together. But to their astonished dismay, and

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to the vociferous delight of the spectators, the light over the door was green!

"What can we do?" asked the saddened Weber. "We have both of us lost!"

And the saddened Fields answered, "We must throw the money away!"

What helps to make this pleasant scene even more pleasing is that the audience was never supplied with any explanation as to the cause of the changes of the color of the lights. That remains to this day a dark mystery.

VI

THIS may not be witty, and it may even not be humorous, but it was funny. It provoked incessant laughter in its progress to its apex, which was greeted with uncontrollable roars. And laughter, like that, clean and simple and honest, is a thing to be thankful for. It is what Artemus Ward called "a sweet, sweet boon." It needs no apology and no explanation; it is its own excuse for being,—even if it resists classification. It is wholesome and hygienic; and as Henry Ward Beecher declared, "Whoever and wherever and however situated a man is, he must watch three things,—sleeping, digestion and laughing. They are three indispensable necessities."

(1919)

XII

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I

IT was in 1861 that Wallack's Theater moved uptown from Broadway and Broome Street to Broadway and 13th Street and that the management passed from the hand of James W. Wallack to that of his son, Lester Wallack. In 1882 Wallack's Theater made another migration, from Broadway and 13th Street to Broadway and 30th Street; and in this third and final home the company failed to find itself as attractive as it had been when it was lower downtown. Lester Wallack had to relinquish its control; and he was glad to accept as a provision for his declining years the proceeds of an all-star performance of 'Hamlet' given for his benefit with Edwin Booth as Hamlet and with Joseph Jefferson as the First Gravedigger.

It was in 1879 while the company was still in its second home, at Broadway and 13th Street, that Lester Wallack made a remark to me which helped to explain why his enterprize came to grief not long after it was transplanted to Broad-

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way and 30th Street. He declared rather plaintively that the management of a theater in New York was in 1879 far more difficult than it had been in his father's time. "We used to bring out the latest London success," he told me, "and to revive the Old Comedies, and with a play now and then from Dion [Boucicault] or from John [Brougham], we got through the season very well. But I don't really know now what people want."

It was because he did not know what the people of New York wanted that he had to give up the management of his theater and to accept a benefit performance arranged for him by his friendly rivals, Augustin Daly and A. M. Palmer. Altho he had been born in New York Lester Wallack was always proud to consider himself an Englishman. So it was that he remained an alien in the city of his birth, unresponsive to the shifting currents of American life and unaware that the playgoers of New York were slowly surrendering their former habit of colonial dependence upon London. Wallack was so insistently English that he never found himself at home in an American part in an American play; and perhaps he may have felt that he was not really qualified to pass on the merits of a drama dealing with the life of this country. Brougham and Boucicault, Irishmen both, had each of them a

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far better understanding of American likes and dislikes than Wallack had, altho such an understanding is, of course, absolutely necessary to the manager of a New York theater.

His more energetic rivals in management, Daly and Palmer, often outbid him for the acquisition of the "latest London success," and they also made direct arrangements to acquire the latest Paris success, whereas Wallack waited until this French piece had been transmogrified into a British piece, almost as foreign to the traditions of the American people as the French original had been. In time Dion and John ceased to supply him with occasional new plays. So it was that he was reduced to the third of his three sources of supply, the Old Comedies. In so doing he was for a while secure from rivalry, altho Daly was soon to become a vigorous and dangerous competitor in this field, which Wallack had long thought to be his exclusive property.

What were these Old Comedies that Wallack mentioned airily and with assurance that his hearer would know exactly what he meant? I can see how the youthful playgoer of to-day might be completely puzzled if called upon to explain this term, perfectly familiar to playgoers who were youthful two score years ago. I can hear this youthful playgoer of to-day asking for a catalog of these Old Comedies and for a list of

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their authors. And I can imagine him wondering also why it is that he has rarely had a chance to see these Old Comedies which delighted the lovers of the acted drama in the days of his grandfather.

II

THE Old Comedies, so called, were a selected group of successful plays which had been produced in the eighteenth century, most of them (altho a few first saw the light of the lamps in the first half of the nineteenth century) and which had survived on the stage, being acted at irregular intervals at the Haymarket Theater in London, at Wallack's and later at Daly's Theater in New York, and at the Boston Museum. Curiously enough, no one of Shakspeare's humorous pieces, lovely comedies and lively farces, was included in the catalog of the Old Comedies, altho they were a century older than the youngest of these Old Comedies; and no one of the comic plays of Shakspeare's contemporaries, no comedy-of-humors by Ben Jonson, no dramatic-romance by Beaumont and Fletcher, was regularly enrolled in this special repertory. And, what is even more curious, no one of the comedies of the Restoration, no brilliant and brutal satire by Congreve or Wycherly, no ingenious intrigue by Vanbrugh or Farquhar, had been able to keep

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the stage and to demand inclusion in this rigorous selection from out the comic masterpieces of the English drama. It may be noted, in a parenthesis, that Daly did revive two of Farquhar's amusing plays, the 'Recruiting Officer' and the 'Inconstant'; but these revivals were due to Daly's own taste and neither of these bold and brisk pieces could claim admission to the recognized group of Old Comedies.

Now, if this group did not include any of the humorous pieces of the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration dramatists, what plays did it contain? And no two students of stage-history would agree on the answer to this question. No council was ever empowered to regulate the canon and to prepare a final list of the comic dramas demanding inclusion. The repertory of the Haymarket was not exactly the same as that of Wallack's, which in its turn did not coincide absolutely with that of the Boston Museum. Yet it is safe to say that every student of stage-history would be likely to put on his list most of the plays which I now venture to include in mine. I find fifteen pieces produced in the eighteenth century which I feel compelled to catalog as truly Old Comedies:

Cibber's 'She Would and She Would Not' (1703).

Mrs. Centlivre's 'Busybody' (1709).

Mrs. Centlivre's 'Wonder' (1717).

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Garrick's 'High Life Below Stairs' (1759).
Colman's 'Jealous Wife' (1761).
Foote's 'Liar' (1762).
Garrick and Colman's 'Clandestine Marriage' (1766).
Goldsmith's 'She Stoops to Conquer' (1773).
Sheridan's 'Rivals' (1775).
Sheridan's 'School for Scandal' (1777).
Sheridan's 'Critic' (1779).
Mrs. Cowley's 'Belle's Stratagem' (1780).
Holcroft's 'Road to Ruin' (1792).
O'Keefe's 'Wild Oats' (1794).
Colman the Younger's 'Heir at Law' (1797).

This list calls for two immediate comments. First, only two of these plays have been acted in any New York theater in the past score of years, that is to say, in the twentieth century; and therefore playgoers under forty have not had the opportunity of seeing any of the others performed by a professional company. Second, every one of these plays was acted in New York during the final forty years of the nineteenth century, some of them being produced at different times by different companies in different theaters. For example, I have had the pleasure in the course of a half-century of playgoing of attending performances of the 'School for Scandal' at Wallack's, at Niblo's, at the Union Square and at three different Daly's theaters.

Perhaps a third comment is warranted, to the effect that my catalog of Old Comedies includes

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specimens of almost every subdivision of the comic drama. The 'School for Scandal' is the foremost example in English of what has been called high-comedy, the humorous play in which character is more important than story and of which the plot is caused by the clash of character on character. 'She Would and She Would Not' is a vivacious comedy-of-intrigue; and so is the 'Belle's Stratagem.' The 'Jealous Wife' in some of its situations, and the 'Road to Ruin' also, are almost too serious to be classed as comic dramas. The 'Critic' and 'High Life Below Stairs' are frankly farces, bustling with business and charged with high spirits. Even the 'Rivals' and 'She Stoops to Conquer' reveal themselves as closely akin to farce, in so far as their respective actions are not caused spontaneously by the volition of the characters but are arbitrarily brought about by the author himself, visibly pulling the wires which control the movements of his puppets. Probably it was the excessive laudation bestowed on these two more or less farcical pieces of Sheridan and Goldsmith which led Sir Arthur Pinero to formulate his satiric definition: "A comedy is a farce by a deceased author."

Possibly a fourth comment may be appended altho it must be apologized for as a doubtful digression. In my list the 'Liar' is credited to

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Samuel Foote, because it could not very well be credited to any other author. But when it was last acted in New York, the text used was a revision by Lester Wallack of an earlier condensation by Charles James Mathews. Moreover Foote's own play was an adaptation of Corneille's 'Menteur,'—an adaptation more or less influenced by an earlier version of the French piece, Steele's 'Lying Lover.' To go still further back, Corneille had taken his story from a Spanish original, the 'Verdad Sospiciosa' of Alarcon. And we may bring to an end this summary record of the strange adventures of a plot by setting down the fact that Alarcon, altho a Spaniard, had been born in Mexico. So we can, if we so choose, claim the 'Liar' in all its many transformations as the earliest play to be written by a native American.

To these fifteen comedies originally produced in the eighteenth century, we may add seven plays produced in the first three score years of the nineteenth century:

Tobin's 'Honeymoon' (1805).

Knowles' 'Hunchback' (1832).

Knowles' 'Love Chase' (1837).

Bulwer-Lytton's 'Money' (1840).

Boucicault's 'London Assurance' (1841).

Boucicault's 'Old Heads and Young Hearts' (1844).

Reade and Taylor's 'Masks and Faces' (often called 'Peg Woffington') (1852).

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To the best of my recollection no one of these nineteenth century pieces has been seen on the New York stage since the twentieth century began.

I have no right to assume that any other theatergoer of fifty years of experience would select exactly these twenty-two plays as being *the* Old Comedies; but I make bold to believe that my selection includes all the pieces which demand to be so grouped together.

III

A LOVER of the theater whose playgoing has been done in the past score of years may be moved to ask why it is that these plays, which evoked the loyal laughter of his father and his grandfather, have been utterly banished from the twentieth century stage, and why they are as unknown in the playhouses of London as they are in those of New York and of Boston. To this question it is possible to give three answers.

In the first place these Old Comedies show the signs of age, even when we read them. They seem to most moderns more or less arbitrary in plot, more or less artificial in dialog, and more or less archaic in method. To assert this is to admit that they are hopelessly out of date both in their content and in their form. They abound,

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for example, in asides and in soliloquies, addressed directly to the audience; and they are decorated with frequent bravura passages, devised to exhibit the virtuosity of the performer, just as the solos of the earlier Italian operas were introduced merely to allow the soprano to execute her variations or the tenor to attain his high C. The tone of these humorous plays is too highly colored for our subdued taste, and many of their characters strike us as caricatures of humanity, almost fantastic in their wilful eccentricity. In short, these pieces one and all belong to a type of drama hopelessly out of fashion, unfamiliar in many of its aspects. In the theater what is unfamiliar is frequently ludicrous, merely because of its unfamiliarity; and we are inclined to laugh at it, as we do at the wearing apparel of a decade ago. In play-making, as in dressmaking, styles change with disconcerting swiftness.

This brings us to the second reason for the disappearance of these Old Comedies from the twentieth century theater. Their departure was coincident with the breaking up of the stock-company, kept together year after year with only occasional changes in its membership. Forty years ago the company at Wallack's, like that at the Boston Museum, was a homogeneous body, with customs of its own, imparted to the new-

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comers it enrolled and accepted reverently by these recruits. It was in the habit of appearing in one or more of the Old Comedies every winter; its elder members knew the traditional business and the traditional effects in each of these comic dramas; and they were glad to pass on this knowledge to the younger members. As a result of this an Old Comedy could always be used as a stop-gap when a new play had failed to please the public; and it could be brought out at a week's notice. In other words, the stock-company was a repertory company, ready to revive on demand any one of a dozen or more Old Comedies and assured in advance that this revival would be welcome to a majority of the playgoers, many of whom would be glad of the chance to compare it with the performances of two or three seasons before.

Altho these companies at Wallack's in New York and later at Daly's also, as well as that at the Museum in Boston, utilized the Old Comedies mainly as life-preservers, to be put on whenever new plays sank under them, they relied upon these new plays for the major part of their season, reserving their revivals for sudden contingencies. But these new plays of half-a-century ago were not widely unlike the Old Comedies in their external characteristics; they also had their soliloquies, their asides, and their bravura pas-

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sages; they were also more or less arbitrary in plot, more or less artificial in dialog and more or less archaic in method, or at least they would so appear to us of the twentieth century if they could be galvanized into life again for our inspection.

The pleasant comedies of T. W. Robertson, 'Caste' for one and 'Ours' for another, which were hailed on their first appearance as "natural" and even as "realistic," have revealed themselves at their most recent resuscitations to be almost as mannered and as mechanical as were the Old Comedies. In fact, the more closely we study the English drama between 1860 and 1870 the more clearly we perceive the influence of the English drama between 1770 and 1780. In the century which stretches from 1770 to 1870 we can observe no violent break in the continuity of the development of the drama.

But between 1870 and 1920 there was a startling change; the drama made a new departure; and this is the third reason why the Old Comedies have been cast out of our twentieth century theaters. The new departure was the result of two influences, working simultaneously. One of these influences was internal; it was the rapid advance of the so-called realistic movement, of which Balzac was the pioneer in the novel and of which the younger Dumas was the pioneer in the

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play. It is easy for us to see now that Balzac and Dumas were both of them on occasion ultra-romanticist; but none the less were they more realistic than their immediate predecessors had been. They tried to present life as they saw it with their own eyes, animated by an unquenchable desire to deal with it frankly and honestly. Balzac spent himself in the effort to be exact and to relate all his myriad characters to the background before which each of them had posed for him; and Dumas was almost as strenuous in his demand for veracity.

The other influence was external; it was the gradual modification of the ground-plan of the playhouse, a modification which resulted at last in the picture-frame stage to which we are now accustomed and to which all the plays of this century are necessarily adjusted. In size and in shape the theater for which Reade and Taylor composed 'Masks and Faces' was very like the theater for which Sheridan had composed the 'School for Scandal,' three-quarters of a century earlier; and it was very unlike the theater for which Sir Arthur Pinero composed 'Mid-Channel,' nearly three-quarters of a century after.

The theater of Reade and Taylor, and of Sheridan also, was a large building with a stage which projected in a curve into the auditorium, so that the proscenium boxes were in the rear of

the footlights. This stage was only dimly lighted,—in Sheridan's time with oil-lamps and in Reade and Taylor's with gas-jets. The curve into the orchestra, far beyond the curtain, was known as the apron; and the most significant episodes of the play had to be acted out on this apron, remote from the scenery, because it was only when he was close to the footlights that the changing expression on the performer's face could be seen by the spectators. As the actor on the stage was in intimate association with the audience, the playwrights did not hesitate to give him confidential asides and explanatory soliloquies to be delivered directly at the neighborly spectators; and they also provided him with the lofty rhetoric and the artfully articulated set speeches not inappropriate to a platform orator.

But in the course of the past half-century the scenic investiture of a play has become more elaborate, more precise, more characteristic and more realistic. The electric light has come to illuminate all parts of the scene with equal brilliancy, so that it is no longer necessary for the performer to advance to the front of the apron in order that his expression may be seen; and therefore the apron, being useless, was abolished. The curtain now rises only a foot or two behind the footlights; and the proscenium-arch is now made to serve as a picture-frame, through which

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the spectator gazes at the performers, who are carefully trained to "keep in the picture." The playwrights, no less than the players, have been compelled to modify their methods; and they soon discovered that soliloquies and bravura-passages were incongruous with the realistic set and with acting carefully restrained until it was afraid to get "outside the picture."

IV

THIS change in the conditions of performance was brought about gradually, unintentionally and by the logic of events. None the less is it one of the most momentous in all the long history of the drama; and we may doubt whether its remoter results have even yet made themselves manifest. It is perhaps the chief cause why the Old Comedies have gone out of favor. They were composed for a different theater, to be performed by actors with a different training, before audiences with different expectations. The companies who were accustomed to act the Old Comedies and who were conversant with their traditions have been dispersed; and the actors of to-day would be ill at ease in these robust and florid comic dramas, but perhaps not more ill at ease than would be the spectators of to-day.

It is not that our actors are individually any

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less gifted than their predecessors of half-a-century ago, or that the art of acting has declined in the past fifty years; and we may venture the suggestion that the old time performers might be almost as awkward and as constrained in our modern problem-plays composed for the picture-frame stage as the contemporary performers would be in the Old Comedies composed for the apron-stage.

It may very well come to pass in the final quarter of this twentieth century, when the conditions of the theater have been still further modified (in ways we cannot foresee), that the best and most representative of the plays popular in the first quarter of this century will reveal themselves as archaic in method as are now the Old Comedies of the eighteenth century. If that should come to pass, some writer of 1970 may be moved to inquire into the reasons why the problem-play of 1920 has been banished from the boards.

(1919)

XIII

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE THEATER

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I

THE drama is now, and always has been, dependent upon the theater. It is only in the playhouse itself that a play reveals its full force. For the complete disclosure of its power, a drama demands not only the theater itself, with the actors and all the accessories, it requires also the presence of the spectators, that we may feel the contagion of communal emotion aroused by its passionate appeal. It has to be born on the stage and to prove thereon its right to live, before it can hope for survival in the study. It must perforce please the playgoers of its own time and of its own country for whom it was specially composed, because only after it has gained their approval is there any chance of its winning the favor of succeeding generations.

The theater can exist without the drama, as it did in imperial Rome when the stage was given over to dancers and acrobats and animal trainers. But the drama can never exist without the theater; and thus it is that those of us who love

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the drama of our own tongue and who want to see it flourish luxuriantly both to-day and to-morrow, cannot but take a keen interest in the organization of the theater. We would like to see it organized on a sound basis, for we are well aware that any defect in its organization will necessarily react injuriously upon the development of the drama.

It need not surprise us that the organization of the theater in the United States in the opening decades of the twentieth century has been the subject of attacks as violent as they are vociferous. I say that it need not surprise us, because all students of the history of the stage are aware that the organization of the theater has never been satisfactory in any country or at any period—except possibly in Greece in the glorious days when Æschylus and Sophocles and Euripides brought forth their rival masterpieces in the spacious Theater of Dionysus just below the towering Parthenon. And we cannot tell whether or not the organization of the Athenian theater was really as satisfactory as it seems to have been, since there may have been many an adverse criticism which has not come down to us after twenty centuries. We do know that the organization of the theater in Rome in the period of Plautus and Terence was most unsatisfactory, with its actors who were slaves and who might be scourged if

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they failed to receive the plaudits they begged for piteously at the end of the play and with its audiences made up of a mob of freedmen often imperfectly familiar with the Latin tongue.

The organization of the theater in England under Elizabeth and in France under Louis the Fourteenth was not approved by many of the subjects of these monarchs; and the better we know it, the less it approves itself to us, since it imposed harsh restriction upon actors and authors alike. The organization of the French theater under Louis the Sixteenth was bitterly attacked by Beaumarchais; and every reader of the 'Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber' will recall his diatribes against the conditions which obtained in England in his time. So every reader of Joseph Jefferson's 'Autobiography' will recall his account of the squalid life led by the wandering companies of actors here in the United States in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Within the past few years Henry Arthur Jones and William Poel have declaimed against the organization of the theater in England at the present time; and the latter has gone so far as to demand drastic legislation to remedy a situation which he deems intolerable.

This being the state of affairs in other lands and in other centuries, we need not be surprised by the vehement protests against the existing or-

ganization of the theater here in America. Nor need we assume that these present protests have as little foundation as had many of those which were raised in the past.

II

THE first thing we find when we undertake investigation is that the organization of the theater here and now is unlike any other which has ever existed anywhere else. In Greece the annual performances were in the hands of the state. In Rome performances were given gratuitously, more often than not, the cost being borne by an aspiring politician wishing to win the suffrages of the mob. In the Middle Ages the performances were at first in the churches under the complete control of the priests; and later they were out-of-doors on church festivals, and in charge of the gilds. In Shakspeare's time and in Molière's a number of the more important actors associated themselves together, arranged for a theater, hired the subordinate performers, and divided the takings at the door, share and share alike. In these companies one of the actors undertook the function of manager, representing his comrades and more or less guiding their fortunes. But these managers had only so much authority as might be delegated to them by their

fellow-sharers; they were not autocrats, engaging and discharging the members of the company according to their own caprice; their risk or their profit was not larger than that of their associates.

In the company at the Globe theater, Burbage seems to have been the dominant personality; yet from all we have been able to gather, we may venture a guess that Shakspeare, with his gift for friendship, his solidity of character and his shrewdness in business, was probably the second in command, so to speak. In the company at the Palais Royal Molière was the honored chief, to whom his fellow-players were loyally devoted; but the associated actors managed their affairs in town-meeting and as an actor Molière shared equally with the others, altho he received extra allowances from time to time to reward his special service as the stock-playwright of the theater. This type of organization is still seen now and again in the United States, when a company, deserted by its manager, continues its existence as a commonwealth; and it is the type which has been preserved by the Comédie-Française in Paris ever since this company was established by Molière.

The French government provides the theater and also an annual subvention, in return for which it designates a manager, who has a stated

salary, and also his equal share of the profits. But this appointed manager is not supreme; he can make no important decision without the advice and consent of the committee chosen by the associated actors. He is in fact an executive only; and his relations with the company depend on his tact, his ability and his powers of persuasion. If he has these qualifications, and if he is successful in rolling up the profits which are annually divided by the associated actors (and which are in addition to their modest salaries) he may be allowed more or less to have his own way. If, on the other hand, he is fussy and feeble, and especially if the receipts fall off, then the associated actors make his life a burden and the last state of that manager is worse than the first.

Altho this type of organization has many evident advantages, and altho it was once almost universal in France, in England, and in Italy, it has been generally abandoned in favor of a simpler type, whereby the power and the profit are concentrated in the hands of a manager who is solely responsible for the recruiting of the company, for the choice of the plays and for the debts of the concern. The change seems to have taken place slowly; and Colley Cibber was one of three actors who directed the destiny of the theater to which he was attached. Yet at that very time the rival theater was most autocrat-

ically managed by an illiterate speculator named Rich.

The reason for the change is not far to seek. The management of a theater is, after all, a complicated business enterprize, exceedingly difficult to conduct successfully; and a business enterprize is always one man's job. A commonwealth is impossible unless there is the cordiality which makes for co-operation; and actors are often superabundantly endowed with the artistic temperament which makes them kittle cattle to drive. Even in Paris, it would probably be impossible to start a rival company to the *Comédie-Française*, organized on the same basis. Indeed, the *Comédie-Française* itself has more than once been on the edge of shipwreck; its most popular actors and actresses have deserted it from time to time, Rachel and Sarah Bernhardt, Coquelin and Lebargy; and its continued existence is due to the cohesive force of its inherited traditions, some of which go back to Molière, while others are codified in the famous decree signed at Moscow by Napoleon.

In the eighteenth century the two rival theaters in London, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, were managed for long periods by George Colman the elder and by David Garrick; they had secured as members of their respective companies almost every actor and actress in Great

Britain who had achieved eminence; and the companies they collected remained almost unchanged from year to year, new recruits being drafted from the provinces only as the veterans ceased to lag superfluous on the stage. As the result of this continuity of association the tragedians and the comedians knew each other intimately and they were accustomed to the team-play which is essential to an effective performance.

In the nineteenth century, Montigny made the Gymnase the most attractive playhouse in Paris, excepting only the Théâtre Français. Madame Vestris gave a temporary vogue to Covent Garden; and Buckstone held the reins for a longer period at the Haymarket. In New York there were stock-companies of a similar permanence, altho of a less even excellence, first at the Park Theater, next at Burton's and finally at Wallack's and at Daly's. In Boston, R. M. Field at the Museum was able to keep together, for a term of years, in fact, for more than a quarter of a century, a strong and coherent company of comedians headed by William Warren; and in San Francisco for a briefer period John McCullough and Lawrence Barrett surrounded themselves with actors and actresses of undeniable ability.

It was only in the last third of the nineteenth

century that this type of theatrical organization slowly disappeared. When the Bancrofts had firmly established themselves in London in the little Prince of Wales's Theater, they began to engage actors not for the whole of a single theatrical season, but only for the run of the piece. It is true that half-a-dozen of the more important performers remained with them and were provided with parts in play after play; but there was no longer any permanence in the membership of the company. The example of the Bancrofts was followed by the Kendals, by Wyndham and by Hare, and even by Henry Irving. These managers all engaged special performers to suit the characters of the successive plays that they produced; and they were thus relieved of the increasing expense of maintaining a stock-company capable of presenting any kind of play, comedy or tragedy or melodrama. As England is only a comparatively small island and as the multiplying railroads made it easily accessible from all parts of the kingdom, people from the provinces flocked to the capital and the plays presented in London ran for constantly increasing periods, from a hundred to even a thousand nights. And during these runs the manager was not paying salaries to actors whose names were absent from the program. So it came about that the stock-companies ceased to be and that the leading per-

formers became part-time workers, appearing now in one playhouse and now in another, and yet fairly familiar with the methods of the other performers likely to be engaged with them for any new play or for any revival of an old play.

III

THE abandonment of the permanent stock-companies and the practice of engagements only for the run of the piece, was brought about in Great Britain by economic pressure due in part to geographic conditions. And it was brought about in the United States almost simultaneously by a similar economic pressure due to widely different geographic conditions. The organization of the American theater prior to 1870 was very much what the organization of the British theater had been a century earlier. In every town of any importance there was at least one theater, occasionally owned by the manager but more generally leased by him. It was his private enterprize; he engaged the actors and the actresses, who were likely to remain with him season after season; he accumulated his own scenery, his own costumes and his own properties; he stood ready always and at forty-eight hours' notice to put up 'Hamlet' or the 'School for Scandal,' the 'Lady of Lyons' or 'Camille,' 'Uncle

'Tom's Cabin' or 'Ten Nights in a Bar-room,' 'Mazeppa' or the 'Naiad Queen,' without invoking any outside assistance.

If wandering stars came along, Forrest or Booth, "Jim Crow" Rice or Lotta, they were supported by his company clothed from his wardrobe, with properties from his own storehouse and with the primitive stock-scenery which had been seen in a hundred other plays. The manners and customs of those distant days are preserved for us in the autobiographies of Anna Cora Mowatt, of Joseph Jefferson, and of Clara Morris. More often than not, the manager was himself an actor, Burton or Wallack appearing now and again on his own stage; and his wife was not infrequently the leading lady. Sometimes the manager was a playwright, William Dunlap or Augustin Daly; and then he found his profit in presenting his own pieces. Sometimes he had been recruited from some other calling, R. M. Field or A. M. Palmer; but always was he devoted to the drama, thoroughly familiar with the traditions of the stage, and thoroughly enjoying his association with the theater. He was a local institution; and sometimes, Caldwell in New Orleans or Rice in Chicago, he was one of the leading citizens of the town.

When a popular minstrel-company wanted the theater for a week or two, the manager was some-

times obliging enough to send his company to play in a smaller city if its "opera-house" chanced to be unoccupied. He did this more willingly when a glittering spectacle, the 'Black Crook' or the 'Twelve Temptations' asked him to turn out; but this complaisance hastened his downfall, since his well-worn scenery had a pallid look after the effulgent splendor of the interloper. Then, after a while, one and another of the more prominent stars (Joseph Jefferson, first of all, as he confesses in his autobiography), dissatisfied with the inadequacy of the mounting of their plays and disgusted by the carelessness and incompetence with which they were only too often supported by the stock-actors, began to engage companies of their own, with all the performers specially chosen for the characters they were to impersonate; they arranged to carry with them the special scenery required by the plays they intended to present that season. Soon there were so many of these, that at least one theater in each of the larger cities gave up its own company and relied exclusively upon these combinations, as the travelling companies were then called.

For a few years the managers of the stock-company houses made a valiant fight; but in the end they had to retire from the field, defeated. It had been a severe blow to them, when they

were deprived of the potent attraction of the stars. Without these stars, and in fact in opposition to them, the performances given by the stock-companies were found to be inferior. The local scenery, the local costumes and the local properties were discovered to be mere make-shifts, unworthy at their best, and often worse than unworthy, especially when they were compared with the stricter propriety of the scenic equipment provided for the elaborate productions sent out from New York. The local offerings appeared to be provincial, whereas those which were brought from afar had on them the stamp of metropolitan approval.

So it was that sooner or later the managers of stock-companies had to withdraw from a lost battle. Some of them kept their theaters and sank to the humble position of janitors. Some moved to New York and became producers on their own account and managers of travelling companies. Some retired to obscurity; and some died in time to escape bankruptcy. Whether the vanquishing of the local stock-companies by the travelling companies was advantageous or not, it was inevitable since it was the result of inexorable economic conditions, in conjunction with equally inexorable geographic conditions. It was a swift and startling change in the methods of conducting the business of the theater, a

change brought about by forces wholly beyond the control of those engaged in that business.

Before the end of the nineteenth century the organization of the theater in the United States became what it is now. In New York, in all the larger cities and in most of the smaller, the playhouses are controlled by one or the other of the two rival syndicates. The resident managers of these playhouses are scarcely more than caretakers, since they can exercise little or no choice as to the attractions which play engagements in their theaters. The producing managers choose plays, engage actors and are responsible for all the accessories. Most of these producing managers are in partnership with one or the other of the syndicates, because these syndicates control all the important theaters in all the important towns. Thus it is that the artistic guidance of the drama is in the hands of the producing managers, and the financial government is in the hands of the syndicates.

Many of the producing managers are akin in type to the managers of the resident stock-companies, that is to say, they are sometimes actors, sometimes playwrights and sometimes men drawn from other callings by the lure of the theater. Most of the members of the syndicates are men of affairs, who have gone into the theater-business as they would go into any other busi-

ness, mainly for their own profit; and their interest in the drama as an art is intermittent, whereas their interest in the theater as a business is incessant. Their attitude and their actions have called for sharply hostile criticism, summed up in the accusation that they have commercialized the theater. Now, all students of stage-history know that there has always been a commercial side to the theater, excepting in ancient Greece and in the Middle Ages, when the drama was more or less religious in its associations. In modern times we have ascertained that the drama cannot flourish as an art unless the theater prospers as a business. No art can survive unless it affords a fairly satisfactory living to those who devote themselves to it; and as the appeal of the drama is to the people as a whole it can never be independent of the takings at the door. Even in the few subsidized theaters of Europe, national or municipal, the grant in aid made by the government is never enough to support the enterprise.

IV

COMMERCIALISM in the theater is often bitterly denounced by young persons who conceive of art as ethereally detached from all financial considerations. The real question is not whether the theater is commercial, but whether it is unduly

commercial, whether it has money-making for its chief aim, whether it is willing to sacrifice its artistic aspirations to the single purpose of making money. The theater was commercial, to a certain extent, in the time of Shakspeare and Molière, of Sheridan and Beaumarchais; but it was not then unduly commercial. Is it unduly commercial now and here, to-day in the United States? Is its organization exclusively in the control of men who are thinking only of the profits to be made, and who know nothing and care less about the drama as an art?

Here again it is necessary to distinguish and to point out the yawning gulf between the playhouses which are truly homes of the drama and the playhouses which have been surrendered outright to mere spectacles. There are in our theaters to-day a heterogeny of so-called musical comedies, summer song-shows, Follies and Passing Shows, sometimes beautifully mounted but often empty of anything but glitter and violent movement, far-fetched fun, and unnecessary noise. These exhibitions occupy the stages of theaters where we might hope to see something better; they are money-making speculations, no more and no less; they supply nothing but vacuous entertainment for those who go to a show warranted to demand no mental effort from the spectators; they are examples of naked commer-

cialism. As far as the drama is concerned, they are utterly negligible, as negligible as is the circus which now invades the theater only at very rare intervals.

There remain to be considered the large proportion of our theaters the stage-doors of which remain open to the drama in all its various manifestations, tragedy, comedy, farce, problem-play, or what not. Now, nobody familiar with the facts can deny or doubt that the theater here and now is hospitable to the drama. No really noteworthy European play, no matter where it was originally brought out, fails to be presented sooner or later in New York. It may be gay, the latest Parisian farce, for example; and then its chance comes sooner. It may be somber or even gloomy, the 'Weavers' of Hauptmann, for instance, the 'John Ferguson' of St. John Ervine or the 'Jest' of Sem Benelli; and then its chance may be late in coming. And side by side with these more or less important importations there are a host of native pieces of every degree of merit, reflecting almost every aspect of American life and character, from the 'Salvation Nell' of Edward Sheldon to the 'Why Marry?' of Jesse Lynch Williams, from the 'Mrs. Leffingwell's Boots' of Augustus Thomas to the 'Get Rich Quick Wallingford' of George M. Cohan.

Nor is the drama of the past without its oppor-

tunity also. Sothorn and Marlowe draw audiences limited only to the capacity of the houses in which they appear; Robert Mantell carries with him a varied repertory; and Walter Hampden is enabled to present 'Hamlet' for an unexpected series of performances. It must be confessed that Shakspeare is more fortunate than Sheridan and that we have not now the privilege of beholding the 'Rivals' or the 'School for Scandal' or any of the Old Comedies as frequently as we used to have it in the days when Burton and Wallack and Daly managed their own theaters and had permanent companies accustomed to present these specimens of a form of the drama now demoded.

It is a lamentable fact, the full significance of which is grasped only by a few, that New York, perhaps the most populous city in the world, is entirely dependent on road-shows. It has now no theater managed with an eye single to its appeal to the population of Manhattan. It has to rely absolutely upon travelling combinations. It is true, of course, that many of these combinations do not travel; they begin and end their careers here in New York; but they were all of them intended to travel, if they had first succeeded in New York. The stars open their season where it is most convenient and they come into New York when they can; but the immense

majority of new plays, American and British and translated from foreign tongues, are produced in New York, altho some of them may have a trial week in Washington or Atlantic City, a week of dress-rehearsals before a relatively unimportant audience. If these new plays please Broadway, they stay as long as they can and then they pack up and begin their wanderings to other cities. Experience has shown that this is the only profitable way to conduct the theatrical business; and economic conditions are as inexorable in the theatrical as in any other business.

The geographic conditions reinforce the economic; and in the United States the geographic conditions differ widely from those in any other country, more especially from those in Great Britain. As London is an easily accessible capital of a small country, the heaviest receipts are to be expected from the performances there; the London companies are engaged for the run of the piece; and they do not go on the road, the provinces being visited only by inferior touring companies. As New York is a far longer distance from most of the other large cities of the United States and as there are many of these large cities, as well as many smaller towns, equally eager to welcome any play which has won metropolitan approval, the heaviest receipts are often not in New York itself but in the multitude of these

other cities and towns. Therefore New York is, in the eyes of the producing managers, often only a starting point; and their ultimate goal lies in the vast territory which stretches from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The outside market, so to speak, is so wide and the demand so insatiable, that the producing managers are hard put to supply it. And when they happen to hit on an attractive piece their profits may be enormous.

One reason why the American theater seems to many to be unduly commercialized is that it has been at times amazingly profitable. Until toward the end of the nineteenth century the theatrical was the most precarious of businesses, extra-hazardous for the managers, the actors and the authors. When they died Shakspeare and Molière were able to leave to their families only a modest competence. David Garrick is almost the only manager in all the long history of the theater in Great Britain and the United States who was able to retire with a fortune. Benefits had to be arranged for Lester Wallack and for A. M. Palmer. The playwrights were in no better case than the players or the managers; and in the nineteenth century more than one potential dramatist turned novelist simply because novel-writing was easier and more profitable than play-writing.

But in the final third of the last century the right of a foreign author to control his own work was internationally recognized, thus relieving the playwrights of our language from competition with pieces purloined from alien authors. The right of a British author to control his work in the United States was also established, relieving the American playwright from competition with pieces imported from England without payment. The far-flung British Commonwealth continued to expand; and the remoter regions of the United States became more densely populated. And the most successful pieces of British and American authorship were discovered to be exportable to France and Germany and Italy.

V

IN consequence of all these causes the possible profits of a lucky playwright are now as abundant as those of the lucky novelist, and on occasion even more so. One play in every score draws a prize; and one in every hundred draws a grand prize of several hundred thousand dollars. In addition to the ordinary business profit there is now the possibility of holding one of these superlatively lucky numbers in the lottery; and two or three of these may come out of the wheel of fortune in the same season. This possi-

bility is encouraging to those possessed by the spirit of speculation and rather discouraging to those who are more inclined to honor the drama as an art. At best the presentation of a play is a gamble, since no one, not even the most expert, can do more than guess at the impression it will make on the public. What every one can see is that the broader and bolder its topic and its treatment the more likely is a drama to prove attractive to the largest body of playgoers, while the comedy of lighter fabric and of more delicate texture will probably please only a smaller group of the more refined and the more intelligent.

Of course, this has always been the case; and the managers of the past have always been tempted to enlarge their audiences by indulging in sensation and in spectacle. But to-day the temptation is greater than ever before; and perhaps it is more often yielded to. And here we feel the unfortunate power of the purely commercial syndicates who are ready always to smooth the path of the overwhelming success by opening all their theaters to it, while they are inhospitable to plays of a less emphatic allurements. This is perhaps the most obvious defect of the present organization of the theater in America—that it puts great power in the hands of a small group of men, most of whom take little or no interest in the drama as an art, regarding a play as a manu-

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factured article out of which they expect to make all that the traffic will bear.

Yet as this present organization is the result of economic and geographic causes it is idle to declaim against it; and it is foolish to indulge in offensive personalities. What is, is; and what will be, will be. We can find comfort in the fact that the best plays of this burgeoning dramatic epoch do get acted and have their chance, here and now. And we can hope that some device will be discovered to make easier the production of plays of the highest class. There are managers now, and not a few of them, who have aspirations and ambitions, and who would be contented with a modest profit on a fair business risk without seeking always for wealth beyond the dreams of avarice through a long-shot gamble.

Perhaps it may be well to remark that the present organization of the theater is not responsible for the fact that the average play presented to-day is often seen to be a pretty poor thing. In this respect the present is no worse than the past. The average play has always been a pretty poor thing; and playhouses of other times and other lands have presented a host of plays below the average. The 'Titus Andronicus,' which is more or less Shakespeare's, is a barbarous and brutal piece; and 'Measure for Measure' is

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only a little better in its blatant crudity of motive and method. The contemporaries of Corneille and Molière and Racine are deservedly forgotten. So are the contemporaries of Æschylus and Sophocles and Euripides. Only devoted explorers of the annals of the drama are aware of the ineptness and imbecility to be found in the pieces of the inferior playwrights even in the most glorious epochs of the theater. Certainly the average play of to-day is a better play, it is better acted, and it is better mounted than the average play of fifty or a hundred years ago.

VI

THAT the drama of our language has been born again in the last three or four decades is proof positive that the organization of the theater has not been wholly inefficient. It cannot be as defective as has been shrilly proclaimed by juvenile enthusiasts who are in a hurry for the millennium and who are disappointed that it does not arrive over night. It is to be put to its credit that in one city at least, in the city of New York, the persistent playgoer has a very wide range of opportunity—probably unrivaled anywhere else in the world. He has his choice of a hundred new American plays every season, plays good, bad and indifferent. He has a chance to see the

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most important plays by contemporary foreign dramatists. He is likely to have occasion in the course of a single season to renew his acquaintance with half-a-dozen or half-a-score of Shakspeare's comedies or tragedies. He may wander at will to playhouses where the performances are given in French or in German, in Chinese or in Yiddish. He can feast his eyes on the puppet-shows of the Italians and on the ballet-pantomimes of the Russians. He can adventure himself in any one of half-a-dozen Little Theaters devoted to the very latest effusions of the most idealistic idealists and the most realistic realists, native and foreign. In short, he will find on the annual bill of fare a heterogeny of tempting dishes, lacking, it is true, more than one delicacy which he may desire to taste.

The other side of the ledger, however, tells another story. While New York has a plethora and while a few of the largest cities may find a sufficiency, the smaller cities suffer from painful penury, and the less important towns are starving to death. Many an interesting play lacks breadth of popular appeal; and the managers shrink from taking it on the road; and if they are bold enough to run this risk it is only to a few of the larger centers of population that they dare to go. In the smaller cities possessing only one important playhouse, this may be occupied week

after week by mere shows. It is true that in not a few of the smaller towns there are stock-companies making a brave struggle, putting on the more successful pieces as soon as these are released for stock but producing them in haste as best they can with a small company, the members of which are sadly overworked, playing in one piece six nights, and four, five or six matinees while they are scrambling through rehearsals and learning their parts in the play in preparation for the following week.

In the towns which are still smaller, the drama is to be seen only sporadically, intermittently, casually; and there are college communities with a thousand students or more who do not have the privilege of seeing a play of Shakspeare's properly acted and adequately produced from one year's end to another. The only reliance of these communities is on the happy accident of a travelling company filling out a week with one-night stands or the establishment by themselves of a Little Theatre supported by local talent. These Little Theaters are helpful in keeping alive an understanding of the drama; but their scope is strictly limited and their continued existence depends upon the fortunate accident of their control by some one who has a native gift for management and for stage-management.

The existing organization is not unsatisfactory

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as far as New York is concerned. It is less satisfactory even in the largest of the other cities. It is entirely unsatisfactory in the smaller cities and the larger towns.

How then shall this unfortunate condition be remedied? Professor W. L. Phelps has no doubt that he has discovered the cure; and he tells us with all the emphasis of italics that "there must be a stock-company in every city." He explains that by this he does not mean the kind of stock-company which exists to-day but the older type of stock-company such as existed forty years ago in New York at Wallack's and Daly's and in Boston at the Museum. What Professor Phelps is proposing is a return to the system which flourished a century ago, and two centuries ago, and which is entirely unfamiliar to the present. As it happens I am old enough to be able to supplement with my own recollection the ample information easily accessible in actors' autobiographies and in stage histories. Memory is treacherous, so I cannot be certain, but I believe that I was present in 1869 at the opening of the Fifth Avenue Theater by Augustin Daly and in 1872 at the opening of the Union Square Theater by A. M. Palmer. I know that I was able to follow the shorter careers of the companies at the Madison Square directed by Steele Mackaye and the Mallorys, at the Park Theater by Abbey, at

the Empire by Charles Frohman and at the Lyceum by Daniel Frohman.

In all these theaters there was a permanent company, which changed its membership slowly and which contained at least half-a-dozen actors and actresses of distinction. In all of them the manager was an autocrat, selecting the performers and choosing the plays. Now and again he engaged a travelling star, Edwin Booth or Mrs. Scott Siddons at Daly's and Charles James Matthews or Dion Boucicault at Wallack's; and then all the other parts in the repertory of these stars were assumed by the actors of the stock-company. But these star-engagements were infrequent; and for the most part the burden fell upon the stock-company, which had to be large enough to undertake any kind of piece, comedy or farce, tragedy or melodrama, or even burlesque or extravaganza. The manager distributed the parts subject always to the unwritten law that no performer should be called upon to appear in a character which was not in his or her "line of business." The hero had to be given to the "leading man" and the heroine to the "leading woman." The villain—and in the dramas of those distant days there was likely to be a villain of the deepest dye—was assigned to the heavy man; while the brisk young fellows fell to the lot of the juvenile lead or of the light

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comedian. The broadly comic parts were assigned to the low comedian; and there were frequently two of him, the first low comedy and the second low comedy. Strongly marked characters went to the character-actor, who had to be a master of make-up. The elderly characters were in the hands of the old man and the old woman; there was sometimes also a second old man, altho if the character-actor was both versatile and obliging he could be prevailed upon to play one of the more aged characters. The serving maids were attributed to the singing chambermaid, who would have her best chance when a farce or extravaganza was in the bill.

VII

THE stock-company system had its advantages and its disadvantages, both artistic and economic. The actor—sometimes under contract for several years—could settle down and have a home where he could bring up his children; he was not a tramp, ever on the go and not knowing where he might be one week from another. He was informed as to approximate length of the theatrical season, and he was not in dread of being thrown out of an engagement in the middle of the winter or of being stranded on the road with his salary unpaid for a month.

There was a certain stability and security in his position, altho there was also always the possibility that the manager might exhaust his often meager resources and so find himself unable to keep the theater open or to meet his obligations to his company.

With its incessant changes of bill and with the unending variety of the plays presented, the actors had far more practise in their art than the performers of to-day. With the frequent production of Shakspeare's comedies and tragedies, even the minor members of the company had at least an opportunity to learn how to read blank verse. The permanence of the organization enabled the inexpert young people to become familiar with the methods of their more skilful elders; and it also tended toward the development of that harmony of effort, that team-play, which is of prime importance. On the other hand, the haste with which the constant succession of pieces had to be prepared interfered with thoroughness and with delicacy of interpretation. When a drama was pitchforked on the stage, so to speak, for only half-a-dozen performances, as was often the case, the actors had neither time nor energy to do their best; and they were tempted to fall into the habit of happy-go-lucky slovenliness.

Then the symmetry of the performance was

not infrequently blemished by the fact that there was often in the company no performer really capable of acting a salient part in the play about to be produced; and yet this part had to be undertaken by somebody, however ill at ease he might be. There were round pegs in square holes; and this was unavoidable since it was impossible, more often than not, to engage outside performers, even if the manager had desired to do so,—which he rarely did.

If I may be allowed to call myself as a witness I can depose that I have seen not a few performances of the well chosen company at Wallack's Theater forty-odd years ago which were far less effective than they might have been because one or two prominent characters had to be assigned to performers who were good actors in their own lines but who were hopelessly unsuited to the parts forced upon them because they alone were available. In the 'Shaughraun' of Dion Boucicault, for instance, by the side of Boucicault himself and Harry Beckett, Ada Dyas and H. J. Montague, John Gilbert and Madam Ponisi, who were all admirably adapted to the characters Boucicault had composed for them, there were also Joseph Polk and Ione Burke, who were entirely unsuited to the parts they were forced to play. And there were two equally unfortunate miscastings in 'Diplomacy.' If this was the case

not infrequently at Wallack's with its long prestige, how much more frequent and more flagrant must have been the misfits in the performances in theaters of inferior grade?

Professor Phelps tells us that all would go well if there could be established a stock-company in every city and even in every large town; but Professor Phelps—fortunately for him—was not born long enough ago to have seen the artistic inadequacy which is inevitable in the stock-company, inadequacy in the acting, in the stage-management and in the mounting. The productions of the managers of traveling companies have set a standard to which no resident stock-company can hope to attain. And the cost of an ambitious attempt to satisfy the expectations of the playgoing public would be prohibitive to any intending manager of a stock-company. He would not dare to undertake the task unless he was supported by an endowment, by a subsidy, or by a large body of subscribers, who being sharers in the enterprize might be more tolerant of relatively unimportant deficiencies in acting and in mounting.

There is no doubt that a repertory theater is highly desirable. It might be of inestimable service both to the author and to the actor. The actor is very unfortunate if, in the malleable years of his youth, he finds himself appearing in

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the same part for two or three hundred nights; and the author is unfortunate when his play has had its two or three hundred nights and then drops out of sight forevermore. A repertory theater would provide varied experience for the performers and afford them opportunity to acquire versatility; and it could do a great service to the reputation of the playwrights by reviving and keeping on hand, so to speak, the plays which deserve to be seen again and again.

But under present conditions a repertory theater is economically impossible. The rent of a building and the salaries of actors are now prohibitive. A repertory theater in New York, even if it did not aspire to be a rival of the Théâtre Français, must be described as a luxury,—and like all luxuries it would be expensive. It can come into existence, and it can have a chance to continue to exist, only when a group of lovers of the arts of the drama shall combine to provide the theater itself and to make the path easy for its manager.

(1920)

XIV

MEMORIES OF ACTORS

XIV

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I

A PLAYGOER from my youth up, a playgoer in Paris and London as well as in New York, I have had the good fortune to be on terms of friendly intimacy with not a few of the leading actors of the past half-century, French and British and American. I have elsewhere set down my memories of Edwin Booth and Henry Irving, Joseph Jefferson and Constant Coquelin, four of the foremost figures in the theater at the end of the nineteenth century. There are a dozen or a score of other players with whom I foregathered at one time or another, less prominent in their profession but not for that reason any less attractive in their several ways and not less companionable.

Most of the actors with whom I have had relation were good company; they had seen many men and many places; and their journeyings had worn off any abrading angularities their personalities may have possessed. They had

mixed with all sorts and conditions of men; and they thereby gained the shrewd knowledge of human nature which they needed in their art. They had acquired polish even if they did not always possess culture. They were no more likely to be bookish in their tastes, or even to be widely read, than are the practitioners of the other professions, painters and musicians, most of whom are probably too alertly interested in the immediate present to be tempted into dusty exploration of the past. They were often apt in anecdote and quick of wit, with a wide command over words, the result of their acquisition of the sharp and swift dialog of the stage. In no other calling have I found men swifter to make a joke or to take one, even if it happened to be pointed against themselves.

It is sometimes asserted that actors as a class are inclined to be unduly aware of their own excellence in the quality they profess and even unduly inclined to communicate to others their own opinion of their own achievements. My experience, such as it is, does not support this assertion. I have found the men of the stage at least as modest as the men of the studio and the men of the study. Over-swollen vanity is not the exclusive property of any one profession, and I doubt if it is more frequent in actors than in authors or artists. Where I comb out my mem-

ories the two most exuberant examples of ingrowing and outflowering self-appreciation that I ever had occasion to observe were both of them physicians, who were also authors and who were wholly unable to resist the ever present temptation to dilate upon their own triumphs and to confide to all listeners the frequent compliments they had gluttonously accepted.

There was nothing of this sort in Booth or Irving, in Jefferson or Coquelin; they were far above it; they were free from self-assertion and even from self-consciousness,—altho of course they could not but be aware of their own outstanding position. In fact, I can not recall any successful actor of my acquaintance who was abnormally self-centered, or who took himself too seriously. Sometimes, it is true, I have found an actor who had not yet established his position and who now and again seized a chance to let me know that he had played this or that important part not unsuccessfully. But this was not boastful self-praise, even if it might so seem to the uninformed listener; it was only a supplying of information not otherwise available. A writer or a painter has no need to call attention to his book or his picture, because these survive to speak for themselves, even if there are only a few who have them in mind. But the work of the actor has no permanence; it perishes as it comes

into being; it instantly ceases to be, except as a memory; and it is as a memory that the actor feels himself called upon to revive it. The difference is that whereas the book of the author, the picture of the artist may be only overlooked, the performance of the actor might be actually unknown to us if he himself did not tell us about it.

II

THE first actor whom I came to know was one of the most companionable, the genial John Brougham. In 1869, as a boy I had been present at the opening and at the closing nights of his brief management of the little playhouse in Twenty-fourth Street, behind the Fifth Avenue hotel—a playhouse which not long after became the Fifth Avenue Theater of Augustin Daly and which was rebuilt as the Madison Square Theater by Steele Mackaye. At Brougham's I had seen his ever delightful burlesque, 'Pocahontas,' in which he himself was the rollicking King Powhatan; and I saw also a later burlesque of his, 'Much Ado about a Merchant of Venice,' in which he was an amusing but rather Hibernian Shylock. So it was that when I was elected to the Lotos Club, in the spring of 1871 (while I was still an undergraduate at Columbia College)

I seized the earliest opportunity to make Brougham's acquaintance.

He was not a great actor, that I knew already, altho he was a competent performer; but he had a charming personality, and when he chanced to be cast for a character with which his personality coincided, he was entirely satisfactory. Of course he appeared to best advantage in Irish parts, The O'Grady in Boucicault's 'Arrah-na-Pogue' and Off-lan-aghan in Lester Wallack's 'Veteran,' and above all Sir Lucius O'Trigger in Sheridan's 'Rivals.' I doubt if Sir Lucius has been more sympathetically impersonated by any performer of the second half of the nineteenth century than it was by Brougham. I have seen the character undertaken by W. J. Florence and by Nat Goodwin, actors of a far more opulent equipment than Brougham, yet neither of them succeeded so well in bringing out the gentlemanly simplicity of this lovable character. Goodwin was too completely an American of the nineteenth century to be able to assume the part of an Irish gentleman of the eighteenth century; and Florence, excellent as he was in Irish characters of another kind, bestowed on Sir Lucius a rather finicky affectation, quite out of keeping with the part.

In those distant days the dramatist was sadly underpaid. Brougham told me once that his

price for writing a play for a star was three thousand dollars, payable on delivery of the manuscript, a sum smaller than a month's royalty on a successful play of to-day. And yet more than one of the vehicles Brougham put together for this modest price, ran like the One Hoss Shay. The stage-version of the 'Old Curiosity Shop,' in which Lotta doubled Little Nell and the Marchioness, must have been performed several hundred times; and only less successful were other of the made-to-order pieces he composed for Mr. and Mrs. Barney Williams and for Mr. and Mrs. Florence. These last were congenial labor, since they dealt with Irish themes, more or less in imitation of Boucicault's more solidly built 'Arrah-na-Pogue' and 'Colleen Bawn.'

Where Boucicault was dominating, not to say domineering, Brougham was yielding and unambitious. Their early disagreement over the authorship of 'London Assurance' did not prevent their professional association in later years. When 'Arrah-na-Pogue' was revived in 1873 at Booth's Theater, Brougham played The O'Grady, supporting Boucicault as Shaun the Post and Mrs. Boucicault as Arrah. And when Boucicault in 1879 was strangely ill-advised to undertake 'Louis XI,' in his own adaptation of the play which Casimir Delavigne had made out

of 'Quentin Durward,' Brougham was Coitier; and I can testify that on this occasion the honors were divided, or at least the laughs, for I never listened to any dialog more ludicrous than that between a French king with a pronounced Irish accent and a French physician with an equally persistent brogue. These, as Beau Brummel's valet explained, "these are our failures."

Brougham had his full share of Irish wit, more spontaneous than Boucicault's and less likely to be borrowed. He had also the more English delight in punning. In 'Pocahontas,' after the opening song Powhatan thanks his attendant braves:

Well roared, my jolly Tuscadoras!
Most loyal corps, your king encores your chorus.

And in the same burlesque when John Smith is tied down and about to be put to death, Pocahontas rushes in, crying, "For my husband I scream!" Whereupon the endangered hero raises his head and inquires "Lemon or vanilla?"

These be but airy trifles floating like bubbles atop the dark wave of forgetfulness, which has engulfed many things far more precious. An airy trifle also is Brougham's remark when Pat Hearn (a once notorious gambler) drove past the Ocean House at Newport one summer afternoon with a very pretty woman by his side. "Isn't

that Pat Hearn and his wife?" somebody asked; and Brougham replied at once, "That's Hearn, I know; but I can't say whether or not she is his'n."

III

It was also at the Lotos that I got to know John T. Raymond. This was probably in the fall of 1874, when he was appearing as Colonel Sellers in Mark Twain's 'Gilded Age.' The actor and the author quarreled after a while, quarreled bitterly and never made up their quarrel. No doubt, Mark knew his own creature better than any one else and certainly better than the rather shallow Raymond. But Raymond gave us at least all the external characteristics of the inspired visionary with his inexpugnable optimism, always about to acquire wealth beyond the dreams of avarice and yet for the moment reduced to a frugal dinner of turnips and water, with only a candle to light up his modest store. I have an impression that the cause of the breach with Mark was Raymond's unwillingness to forego two or three easy effects which were always rewarded with thoughtless laughter but which were not really in keeping with the character. Raymond was unduly inclined to skylark even on the stage; I have seen him, in the last act of the 'Gilded Age,' match silver dollars with

a friend he had recognized in the audience. Of course, he chose a moment for the flip of his coin when the attention of the spectators was bestowed upon some other performer, and only a few of them detected his inexcusable pantomime. These lapses from the standard of propriety may not have been frequent, but they occurred far too often; and they could not but be offensive to the author of the play in which the actor was appearing.

When Raymond indulged in tricks of this sort he displayed a lack of respect alike for his audience and for his art. The art had to suffer in silence; but the audience might at any time be moved to protest. I recall that when Raymond was playing Ichabod Crane in 1879 he sent me a box, to which my wife invited three or four of her young friends. In the last act Ichabod comes out into the garden to ask Katrina into the house, where there was merrymaking. To the startled astonishment of our party, Raymond said "Come on in, Katrina! There's lots of fun! Brander Matthews has brought a whole boxful of pretty girls!"—a speech which nobody in the house—except the boxful—seemed to hear or at least to apprehend, probably because it had no relation to the story being acted on the stage.

None the less was Raymond an accomplished comedian, brisk, lively, laughter-compelling and

authoritative. Like many another comic actor, he longed to play pathetic parts; and unlike most of those who have this ambition, he did possess the power of drawing tears. I had first seen him as Asa Trenchard in Paris during the Exposition of 1867, when Sothern had ventured across the Channel to disclose Lord Dundreary to the unresponsive French; and I have never forgotten the simple and manly pathos of the scene in which Asa burns the will leaving him the fortune which would otherwise go to the girl he is in love with. Audiences are always ready to appreciate a brief pathetic episode when the comic character unexpectedly turns his serious side to the spectators. But they are resentful when the funny man whom they have gone to laugh with, and even to laugh at, is presented in a play wherein he is persistently pathetic and not even intermittently humorous. Raymond lost money for himself and for his managers when he impersonated a dreary sobseeker in a dull domestic drama, 'My Son,' derived from a tearful Teutonic tale of woe.

In collaboration with H. C. Bunner I put together a rather boisterous farce called 'Touch and Go,' which Raymond liked enough to contract to produce but not enough for him ever to set about its production. In its place he had brought out in succession two plays in which the

fun was less acrobatic—'In Paradise' and 'For Congress.' After these pieces had run their course, G. H. Jessop (who was a part author of 'In Paradise') came to me with an idea for a comic drama for Raymond and asked me to join him in working it out. It was to be called 'A Gold Mine'; and having in mind Raymond's Asa Trenchard in the 'American Cousin,' I suggested that we lay the scene in London, so as to repeat the contrast of an American with the British. We also decided to develop our plot so that at the end of the second of our three acts Raymond should have a chance to be pathetic if only for a brief moment.

When our play was read to Raymond he was delighted with it; the character suited him and he rejoiced that he was to have an opportunity to show that he could be serious when the situation required it. During his annual tour he tried out our comedy in one of the smaller Western cities on a Friday night. He sent us a glowing report of the reception of our play and of his own triumph at the end of the second act. And in less than a fortnight thereafter we read in the morning paper that he had had a sudden seizure which had carried him off within twenty-four hours.

IV

FORTUNATELY for the authors, thus unexpectedly bereft of the actor for whom the piece had been composed and to whose personality it had been adjusted, Helen Tracy, who had played the heroine in the single performance which Raymond had given, wrote at once to Nat Goodwin, advising him to secure our play, as it had made a hit and as the star-part would just suit him. Goodwin asked us to let him read the piece; he liked it and we soon came to terms with him, both Jessop and I believing that he was an actor of promise, altho up to that time he had never undertaken a part demanding any subtlety of treatment or any veracity of characterization.

When he was a very young man, Goodwin had made his first appearance in a variety-show, giving imitations of the actors then prominent. It is a curious fact that even the most adroit mimics are rarely able to become accomplished actors, competent to sustain a character consistently throughout a play. Goodwin was one of the few exceptions to this rule. He soon gave up mimicry for burlesque, succeeding that fine comedian William H. Crane, in the chief comic part of the perennially popular 'Evangeline' and playing it in careful imitation of his predecessor. As Jo-

seph Jefferson—who had often appeared in burlesque early in his career, notably in a parody of ‘Mazeppa’—once said to me, “burlesque is a very good school for a young comedian, as it tends to give him breadth of effect and certainty of execution.”

From burlesque Goodwin progressed to farce; and when he came to us for ‘A Gold Mine,’ he was playing the part of a drunken undertaker in ‘Turned Up,’ a robustious piece of British manufacture. As the attraction of this whirlwind farcicality was not exhausted, Goodwin arranged with us to postpone our play for a year; and he utilized the delay to prepare the public to accept him in a comedy of a more refined type. He added to his bill the ingenious and whimsical piece called ‘Lend Me Five Shillings’ which Jefferson was still acting occasionally. As he said to me, “I’d sooner finish third to Jefferson than run a dead heat with Dixey!”—Dixey having just made a great hit in ‘Adonis.’

Goodwin also appealed to us to modify the entrance of Silas K. Woolcott, the American who had gone to England to sell a gold mine. “That entrance is all right in itself,” he explained; “and it was all right for Raymond, because he had played parts of that kind before. But I haven’t; and it’s too quiet for me, since they’ll be disappointed if I don’t make them laugh with my first

half-dozen speeches." So we brought Woolcott in through the conservatory, instead of through the front door, and we contrived a very brief episode of equivoke in which Goodwin mistook the butler for a certain Sir Thomas Butler whom Woolcott had been invited to meet.

'A Gold Mine' was a more or less artificial comedy with a complicated plot and with dialog as brilliant as the combined wits of the two collaborators could compass. For the part of the fascinating widow with whom Woolcott was to pair off at the end of the play Goodwin engaged Kate Forsythe; and the rest of the cast was at least adequate if not entirely satisfactory. McCarty of the Boston Theater produced the play most judiciously, making a valuable suggestion for heightening the effect of the pathetic speech at the end of the second act. When we asked Goodwin if he was certain that he could play this serious bit and carry the audience with him, the actor answered modestly, "Yes—at least I think so. You see, I'm going to do it in imitation of Charley Thorne."

This was shrewd, as Charles R. Thorne, Jr., was an actor of straightforward force with a rich and well-modulated voice. It is profitable always for the novice in any calling to take pattern by its experts. As the painter studies in the studio of another craftsman and as the writer

“plays the sedulous ape to many masters,” so the actor can find his profit in imitating and emulating the performances of an earlier generation, not making himself a slave to any one of them but gaining variety and flexibility by capturing and combining the methods of half-a-dozen. John Drew, for example, played one of his earliest parts at Daly’s as he imagined it would have been played by Charles Wyndham; and Wyndham had modelled himself more or less on Lester Wallack as Wallack had earlier sought to achieve the airy lightness of Charles James Matthews. I make this assertion without misgiving as my information came directly from these four comedians; and I may add that Coquelin, the most varied and versatile actor of the end of the nineteenth century, once told me that while he was a pupil of Regnier, he learnt almost as much by incessant observation of Samson, an older artist with a method wholly different from Regnier’s.

It was by his performance in ‘A Gold Mine’ that Goodwin first established his position as an actor of indisputable promise; and in the remaining thirty years of his life he gained in power and in authority. ‘In Mizzoura’ was written for him by Augustus Thomas, on purpose to display the more serious quality the actor had exhibited in ‘A Gold Mine’; and it was this more

serious quality, strengthened by exercise, which enabled him to rise to the noble dignity of the final episode in Clyde Fitch's 'Nathan Hale,' a tragic character which Goodwin portrayed with beautiful fidelity. He became one of the foremost figures on our stage; he even ventured himself in two Shaksperian parts, Shylock and Bottom, in neither of which was he considered to have been entirely successful; and yet despite his prosperity in the theater he never attained to the commanding position his native endowment would have entitled him to, if only it had been sagely administered.

In fact, Goodwin, so it seems to me, threw away a golden opportunity. After the retirement of Edwin Booth, Lawrence Barrett and John McCullough there was an opening for an ambitious actor to win recognition as their worthy successor; and this was an altitude to which Goodwin could have aspired, if he had not been deficient in that intangible and indefinable quality which we call character and which for success in life is really more important than ability. Ability he had in abundance but he did not husband it. He did not take life seriously enough; and therefore his art suffered and failed to mature as it might have done. He dissipated his ardor and wasted his strength in default of the implacable ambition which compels self-con-

trol. Nature had bestowed on him a richer gift than on Lawrence Barrett, who had made himself what he was by stern determination, whereby he overcame his disadvantages. Goodwin had more intensity, more power, more resources; and he might have carved a name for himself as Shylock, Richard III and Iago.

But it was not to be; and he made shipwreck of his career. I failed to see him when he attempted Shylock, for which he ought to have had the fire and the passion, but for which he lacked the training he might easily have attained, if he had forced himself to acquire it. I did see him in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream'; and altho my memories of George L. Fox and of James Lewis as Bottom are still vivid, they are not as gratifying as my recollection of Goodwin in the same part. This revival of Shakspeare's most fanciful and most humorous comedy failed to attract the public, and the blame was currently laid upon Goodwin. To my mind this was unjust, since his rendering of the part seemed to me excellent, firmer in outline and richer in color than that of either Fox or Lewis. I can never forget the delicious self-sufficiency of his performance in 'Pyramus and Thisbe,' his exuberant vanity, his adroit suggestion of the eternal complacency of the self-satisfied amateur.

I may be wrong, of course; I may be crediting

Goodwin with more than he possessed, as I am certainly ascribing to him more than he ever displayed. But I think he had it in him to do finer and stronger things than he ever aimed at. "The pity of it, Iago, the pity of it!"

V

IT would be difficult to find two careers in sharper contrast than those of Nat Goodwin in the United States and of Beerbohm Tree in Great Britain. As there was a vacancy at the head of the procession in America after the withdrawal of Booth and Barrett and McCullough, so there was one in England after the decline and disappearance of Henry Irving. Goodwin was unable to seize the occasion, even if he saw it; Tree saw it and seized it. Altho nature had been niggardly to Tree where she had been bountiful to Goodwin, Tree had the inestimable advantage of a resolute will and of the innate power which impels a man to master the many difficulties besetting our paths in life. It was by sheer force of ambition rather than by assured skill as an actor that Tree forged to the front and took his place as the leader of the profession in the British Isles, catching the mantle of Irving as it fell and wearing it as best he could.

When I first knew Tree he had recently gradu-

ated from comic opera to farce, making his earliest hit in the 'Private Secretary' and replacing Arthur Cecil in the 'Magistrate.' From farce he turned to melodrama and advanced his reputation as an actor by the versatility he displayed in 'Called Back' and in the 'Red Lamp.' For two reasons this versatility was more apparent than real; in the first place because the methods of farce and of melodrama are closely akin, and in the second place because the differentiation of the parts Tree was then playing was largely external, being mainly a matter of make-up, which incompletely disguised his own rather thin and brittle manner.

In time he assumed the management of the Haymarket theater; and still later he was able to build the spacious and sumptuous His Majesty's. At the Haymarket he produced more than one interesting modern comedy and he made more than one interesting revival, notably of W. S. Gilbert's ever-delightful 'Engaged.' At His Majesty's he was soon forced—somewhat to his surprise, so his half-brother, Max Beerbohm once told me—to abandon the more refined types of comedy and farce, simply because the house was too large for any form of drama demanding delicacy. He found himself compelled to rely on more strenuous plays, which permitted elaborate spectacular adornment. He brought out the

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'Herod' of Stephen Phillips and he imported the 'Darling of the Gods' of Belasco and Long. Thus it was that both this necessity and his lofty ambition led him to a series of elaborately pictorial revivals of Shakspeare's tragedies, histories and comedies.

As a producer he continued the tradition of Irving, bestowing upon Shakspeare's plays superb settings, rivaling Irving's in their splendor, their expensiveness and their taste. For 'Twelfth Night,' for example, he designed an Italian garden, rising terrace upon terrace to the very back of the stage, a scene so exquisitely beautiful in itself, so completely satisfying to the eye, that—so Sir Martin Conway told me—some spectators felt it to be an intrusion when the actors entered and distracted attention from the lovely vision. Tree displayed his scenic dexterity and his artistic invention in a dozen or a score of other Shaksperian plays, notably 'Antony and Cleopatra,' produced while Queen Victoria was still upon the throne. There is an anecdote which is doubtless familiar to many, but which I feel I have no right to omit here, to the effect that as the amorous adventures of the serpent of old Nile were unrolled before the entranced audience, one British matron whispered to another British matron, "How different to the happy home life of our dear Queen!"

Of course, Tree reserved for himself all the

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great Shaksperian characters, tragic and comic, Mark Antony, Macbeth and Hamlet, Falstaff and Malvolio. For the loftier tragic parts he lacked the physique and the temperament. He had not the beauty of person, the grace of gesture, the princely bearing, the appealing voice, which the performer of Hamlet ought to possess. He had not the power, the passion, the largeness needed for Macbeth. He had not the elocutionary skill required for the proper impersonation of Mark Antony in 'Julius Cæsar.' But he was intelligent, untiring, strong-willed and self-willed; and he was able to get the British public to accept him in these unsuitable parts, perhaps in some measure because there was then no actor on the British stage who could contest its chieftainship with him.

It is reported that Gilbert said to him after seeing his Hamlet, "Very good, Tree, very good indeed. You were funny without being vulgar." And when Gilbert went around to Tree's dressing room after his exhausting performance of another of Shakspeare's tragic characters, a performance which had left the actor weakened and perspiring, the pitiless wit remarked, "Tree, how well your skin acts." Altho Tree took himself seriously he had a keen sense of humor; and even if he winced under the satiric lash of Gilbert, he could take the joke without offense.

In fact, his sense of humor often came to his

rescue, as another anecdote testifies. He was once acting Hamlet in the provinces when his friend, John Hare, happened to be in the same town. He sent Hare a box; and the unwilling Hare felt that as a fellow-manager he could not refuse this unwelcome invitation. Hare sat in the box in solitary state; and after the curtain fell, he was about to escape when Tree's secretary caught him at the door with the request that he should come to supper. Again the kindly Hare felt that courtesy demanded his acceptance. At table Hare did not mention 'Hamlet' nor did Tree. As soon as he could, Hare bade Tree good night. Tree saw him to the door, and they parted without a word about the performance. Before Hare had gone half-a-dozen paces, Tree called him back. As Hare returned sadly, Tree said with a smile, "I say, Johnny, it is a good *play*, isn't it?"

We may be sure that Tree appreciated the merry jest of his half-brother when at last he attained the honor of knighthood, the final reward of every British actor-manager. As usual the announcement preceded by several days the actual ceremony; and in the interval a friend asked Max Beerbohm as to the actor's exact status during this awkward intermission: "Is your brother a knight now, or isn't he?" And Max answered that he supposed his brother in

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the eye of the law was still Mr. Tree,—“but he is Sir Herbert in the sight of God!”

Tree's disqualifications for the mighty characters in Shakspeare's tragic plays were obvious, but his histrionic limitations were less apparent in the chief characters of the comedies. I did not see him in 'Twelfth Night' but I should conjecture that he gave a not unsatisfactory interpretation of Malvolio, altho it probably lacked the gentle dignity and the melancholy humor which Irving bestowed upon the part. I did see his Falstaff in the 'Merry Wives of Windsor' and it seemed to me altogether the best of his Shaksperian experiments. After all, the 'Merry Wives' is only farce, brisk and bustling; and Tree was experienced and skillful in farce, with no objection to getting all the laughs that the lively situations might authorize. Yet, as I watched his dextrous efforts, I was conscious always that Tree's Falstaff was not really fat; he might be padded out to his proper proportions, but he did not move like a creature of portly figure; and his humor was devoid of unction. He disclosed himself as a clever thin man trying to pass himself off as a humorous fat man.

And in his latter performances of Falstaff he yielded more and more to his besetting temptation to overdecorate a character with petty ingenuities and with finicky details, which came in

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time to detract from its broad outlines. He had an inventive mind and he was continually in search of novelties of gesture and of business. Even in his tragic parts he was prone to obtrusive pettinesses. Often at the end of the run of a play, and sometimes even at the beginning, he seemed to act outside the character rather than inside it.

Yet, when all is said, it remains that Tree deserved well of the playgoing public of London; and this public could not well help being grateful for the many opportunities he had provided for it to behold Shakspeare's plays, always beautifully and tastefully mounted. It had become accustomed to his mannerisms and it knew what to expect when it flocked to His Majesty's Theater. But in the United States, Tree was never able to establish a position comparable with that which he held in Great Britain. On our side of the Atlantic he was only a wandering star; he was not the manager of the foremost theater with the credit of a score of Shaksperian revivals; and we Americans had not become habituated to his defects, and therefore we could not be expected to be as tolerant of them as were his British followers. He was well aware of this atmosphere of indifference, so to speak, in America, an atmosphere he could never dispel. When I saw him last in London, ten or fifteen years ago, he told

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me that he was thinking of crossing over again. "But you don't like my acting in New York," he added sadly; and I could not honestly contradict him, as perhaps he hoped that I should.

VI

WHERE the performances of Shakspeare's plays at His Majesty's were sometimes insufficient was in the acting; and this was not Tree's fault, for he was always eager to strengthen his cast by the engagement of the best actors available. At more than one of his revivals of the 'Merry Wives' he persuaded Ellen Terry and Mrs. Kendal to emerge from retirement to disport themselves as the joyous dames who delight in befooling Falstaff. The fault lay in the fact that fine performers were not to be had. Actors who were good in Shaksperian parts have always been scarce, and they are now steadily becoming scarcer.

Even fifty years ago, when Edwin Booth opened the stately theater he had built for himself, there arose a loud outcry against the mediocrity of his company, an outcry which rankled in Booth's memory and which led him a score of years later to explain to me that he thought the complaint, even if justified, was unjust to him, since he had secured as well equipt a company

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as it was then possible to collect, with Edwin Adams and Mark Smith at the head of it. This came back to my memory when Henry Irving a little later spoke to me about the difficulty he had had in getting fit performers for Laertes and Mercutio and the other important parts of youthful buoyancy. "I engaged Forbes-Robertson and George Alexander and William Terriss, one after another, and I tried to tempt them to stay with me," so Irving said to me. "But they preferred to set up for themselves. I don't blame them, of course; but it is now almost impossible for me to find anybody whom I can trust with these important parts."

It was sometimes meanly suggested that Booth and Irving were each of them unwilling, and perhaps even afraid, to surround themselves with first class actors. The suggestion is as absurd as it is unworthy; and it is plainly contradicted by the record. In the sixties of the last century, when Booth was consolidating his reputation by the earliest hundred night run of 'Hamlet' that any actor had ever achieved, Bogumil Davison came to New York; and the young American promptly invited the German tragedian to play Othello to his own Iago. More than a score of years later Booth again appeared as Iago to the Othello of Salvini. At one time or another he joined forces with Charlotte Cushman and with

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Modjeska. Henry Irving was equally free from petty jealousy; he always treated Ellen Terry as a co-star; and when he engaged Mrs. Sterling for the Nurse in 'Romeo and Juliet' he advertized her name as prominently as his own. No actor ever displayed more generosity to a friendly rival than Irving did when he invited Booth to come for a fortnight to the Lyceum to alternate Iago and Othello.

It was never difficult for Jefferson to find competent actors to support him as Rip Van Winkle; and he always rehearsed the piece carefully to make sure of the needful unity of tone. But it was very hard indeed to find performers of presence, of authority and of the sweep of style required by the boldly contrasted and highly colored characters of a rich old comedy like the 'Rivals.' At one time or another Jefferson secured the companionship of Mrs. Drew, of John Gilbert, and of W. J. Florence, gladly sharing his glory with them. He was delighted with the brief tour of the 'Rivals,' when a galaxy of stars deserted their orbits to twinkle by the side of his Bob Acres. Mrs. Drew was Mrs. Malaprop, Julia Marlowe was Lydia Languish, Robert Taber was Captain Absolute, Nat Goodwin was Sir Lucius O'Trigger, Francis Wilson was Fag and William H. Crane was Sir Anthony Absolute. Here was truly an all-star cast; and the

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combination was triumphantly prosperous. I saw it at the sole performance in New York, a matinee at that; and it was perhaps the best all around rendering of the 'Rivals' that I have ever seen, altho several of those who took part in it, accustomed to the more modern methods of our latter-day dramatists, were not quite at ease in their efforts to catch the tone of artificial comedy.

It is true, alas! that there are actors, and some of them are expert and accomplished performers, who when they rise to be stars not only seek to grasp all the good things for themselves and to monopolize the spot-light, but who even go so far as to begrudge any laughter or any applause which may be evoked by the members of their companies. Forty years ago one of the most prominent comedians on our stage had this pitiable characteristic. At the first performance of a play specially written for him, this star was standing in the wings waiting his turn to go on. Suddenly there was a roar of laughter and a round of applause. "Who's that?" cried the star, "What did he say?" And at the second performance the line which had been so well received was cut out. And twenty years ago there was an American comic actress of robust force and wide popularity who slowly lost the favor of the public because she insisted on producing

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plays in which she never left the stage and for which she engaged actors and actresses who were feeble and colorless.

It is not only natural, it is also wise, for a star to see to it that his part is interesting and that it holds its interest from the first act to the last. He cannot help knowing that he is the lodestone which attracts the audiences. They pay their money to see him; and they are not getting their money's worth if they do not see enough of him. But the spectators are best pleased with the star himself, they are most likely to hold him in delighted remembrance and to want to see him when next he comes to town, if he has given them a well-balanced play, in which every part is filled by a performer who can get out of it all it is worth. There are some stars who are almost self-effacing, and who do not even care whether or not they have their full share of the emphatic situations upon which the curtain falls. It was pointed out by not a few of those who saw 'Leah Kleschna,' when Mrs. Fiske produced it with a brilliant and well-balanced cast,—John Mason, George Arliss, Charles Cartwright, William B. Mack,—that the star let Mack have the curtain of the third act.

VII

If it was difficult for Booth fifty years ago and for Irving thirty years ago to find well-graced and well-trained actors to sustain the secondary characters in Shakspeare's comedies and tragedies, it is far more difficult to-day, when our dramatists, even when they are poets, are rarely tempted to write plays in five acts and in blank verse. Our modern drama is composed in pedestrian prose; and the men and women of our theaters have little or no occasion to speak the language of the gods. They are used to a dialog which aims at an apparent reproduction of the speech of everyday life; and therefore they have not been called upon to acquire the art of delivering the rhythmic utterance of tragic heroes and heroines. They are all striving to be "natural," as befits a stage whereon the scenery and the furnishings are as far as may be those of real life. They are likely to have a distaste for blank verse, which cannot but seem to them artificial, stilted, "unnatural."

Of course, no stage-dialog can be natural, strictly speaking. It must be compact and significant; it must flow unbroken in the shortest distance between two points. But to-day actors and audiences alike are so accustomed to the

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picked and polished prose of Barrie and Pinero, of Clyde Fitch and Augustus Thomas, that this appears "natural" to them, because they do not note its divergence from the average talk that falls on their ears outside the theater, whereas they cannot help feeling that the steady march of ten-syllabled iambics is a violent departure from our habitual manner of communicating information and of expressing emotion. In other words, even if our stage-dialog to-day is "unnatural," as stage-dialog always has been and always will be, it is far less obviously "unnatural" than blank verse. A long and severe self-training is necessary before a performer can feel at home in blank verse, and before he can impart colloquial ease to it.

Yet it is a fact that we who speak English have a tendency toward the iambic rhythm when we seek to move an audience. This rhythm may be unconscious and it may be irregular; but it is unmistakable in the death-bed scenes of Dickens, for example, where he was insisting on the pathetic, and in the orations of Ingersoll, where he was making his most powerful appeal. The Kembles were so subdued to what they worked in on the stage that they were prone to drop into blank verse on occasions when it was not appropriate. Mrs. Siddons is said to have startled the salesman who was showing her a piece of goods

by asking, "And will it wash?" The first time she met Washington Irving after he had published the 'Sketch-Book,' she said to him, "Young man, you've made me weep"; and when she next met him after he had published another book, she said "Young man, you've made me weep again!"

Her brother, John Philip Kemble, was a great friend of Sir Walter Scott; and once when they were crossing a field together, they were chased by a bull. "Sheriff," said the actor to the author, "methinks I'll get me up into a tree." Fanny Kemble, whose reading of Shakspeare's plays Longfellow commemorated in a noble sonnet, was the daughter of Charles, another brother of Mrs. Siddons. Once when she went on the platform to read, she found that a cane-bottomed chair had been provided for her. She turned majestically to the gentleman who was escorting her and inquired, "And would you give my velvet gown the small-pox?" When her remote kinswoman, the fragile amateur, who called herself Mrs. Scott-Siddons, came to Fanny Kemble for professional guidance, she begged for advice about making points; and she was not a little frightened by the force of the swift retort: "Points, girl? I never was a point actress!"

This, all this, was long, long ago; and a great

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deal of water has gone under the bridge since those distant days. I have to confess that I never caught Edwin Booth or Henry Irving lapsing into blank verse off the stage.

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